



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

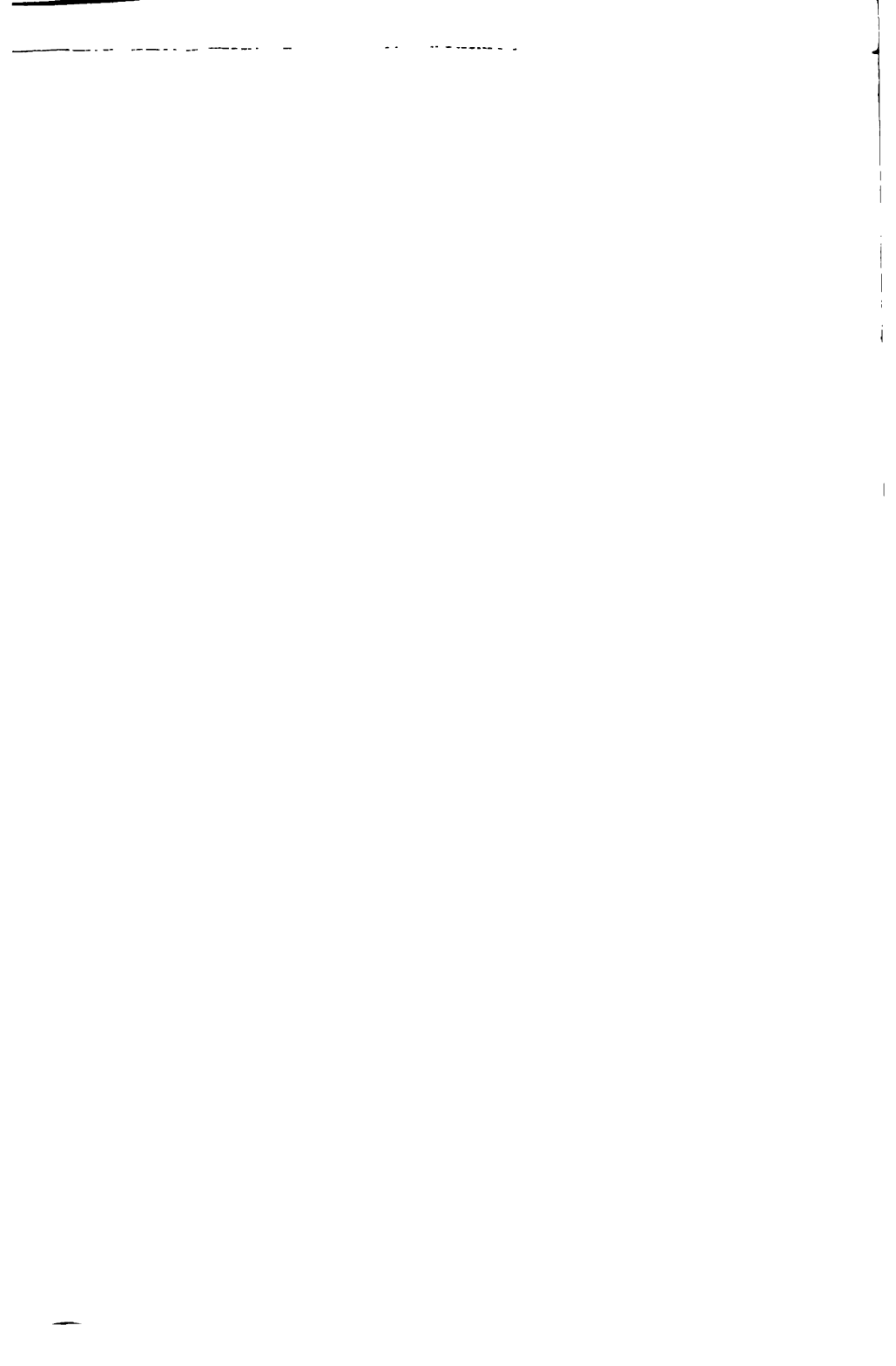
- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

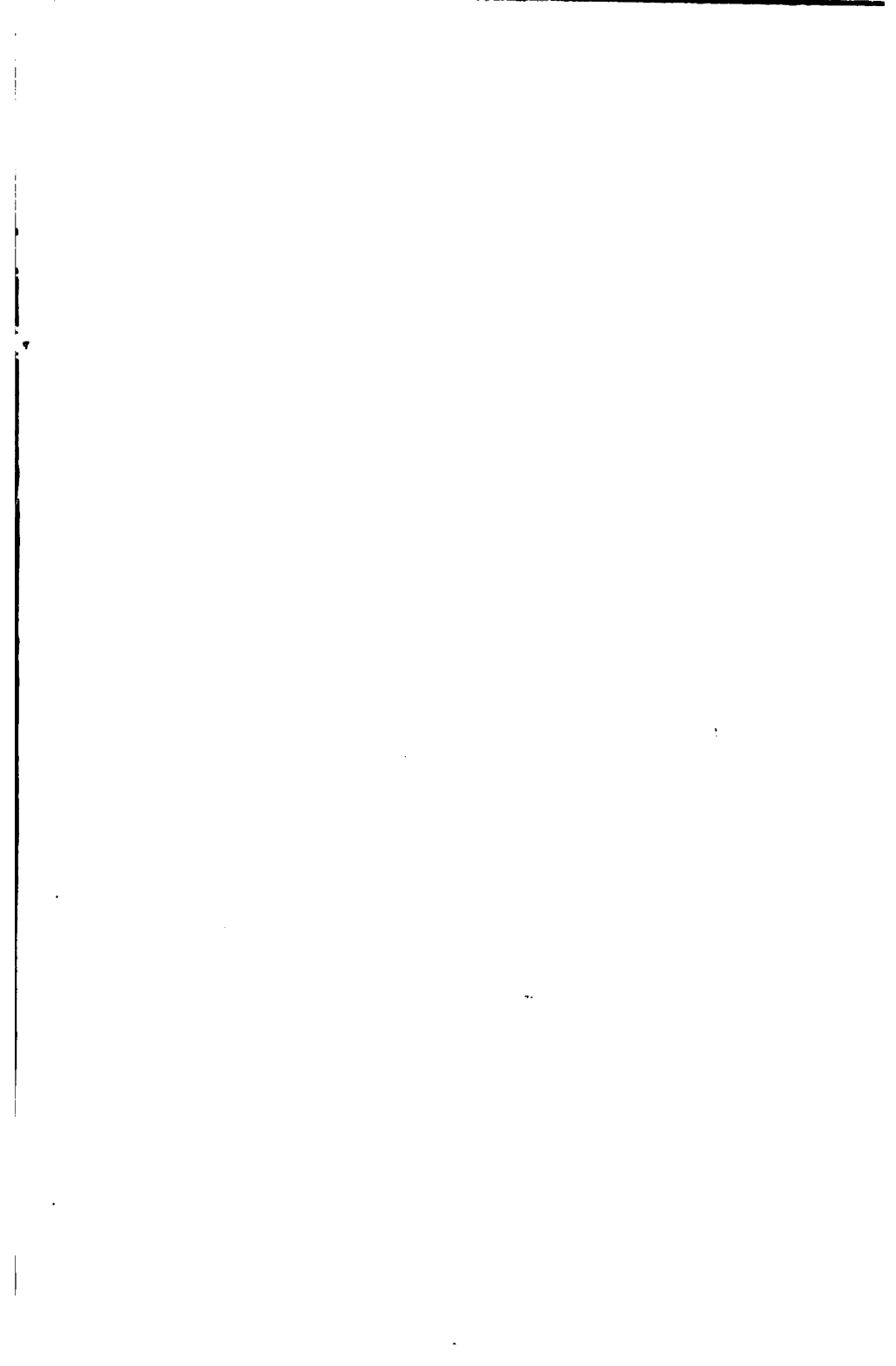
### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>











# HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY H. A. TAINE, D.C.L.

Translated from the French by H. Van Laun

One of the Masters at the Edinburgh Academy

VOLUME I.

PART I.

Philadelphia

THE GEBBIE PUBLISHING CO., LIMITED

LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS

1897

Storage

~~Journal Graduate~~

~~Library~~

PR

93

.T133

1897

v.1

pt.1

PR

93

.T133

1897

v.1

pt.1



## PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

---

THIS edition of Taine's History of English Literature has been carefully revised and compared with the original. All the quotations have been collated and verified anew, and no trouble has been spared to make it as accurate as possible.

For the favourable reception this translation has met with from the press and the public, I feel much indebted.

H. VAN LAUN.

THE ACADEMY,

EDINBURGH.



# CONTENTS.—VOL. I.

## PART I

### INTRODUCTION.

	PAGE
Historical documents serve only as a clue to reconstruct the visible individual . . . . .	2
The outer man is only a clue to study the inner, invisible man . . . . .	6
The state and the actions of the inner and invisible man have their causes in certain general ways of thought and feeling . . . . .	10
Chief causes of thoughts and feelings. Their historical effects . . . . .	13
The three primordial forces—	
I. Race . . . . .	17
II. Surroundings . . . . .	19
III. Epoch . . . . .	21
History is a mechanical and psychological problem. Within certain limits man can foretell . . . . .	23
Production of the results of a primordial cause. Common elements. Composition of groups. Law of mutual dependence. Law of proportional influences . . . . .	25
Law of formation of a group. Examples and indications . . . . .	30
General problem and future of history. Psychological method. Value of literature. Purpose in writing this book . . . . .	32

## BOOK I.—THE SOURCE

## CHAPTER I

*The Saxons.*

	PAGE
I. Their original country—Soil, sea, sky, climate— Their new country—A moist land and a thank- less soil—Influence of climate on character . . .	37
II. Their bodily structure—Food—Manners—Unculti- vated instincts, German and English . . .	41
III. Noble instincts in Germany—The individual—The family—The state—Religion—The Edda— Tragi-heroic conception of the world and of man- kind . . . . .	49
IV. Noble instincts in England—Warrior and chieftain —Husband and wife—The poem of Beowulf— Barbarian society and the barbarian hero . . .	58
V. Pagan poems—Kind and force of sentiments—Bent of mind and speech—Force of impression ; harsh- ness of expression . . . . .	68
VI. Christian poems—Wherein the Saxons are predia- posed to Christianity—How converted—Their view of Christianity—Hymns of Cædmon— Funeral hymn—Poem of Judith—Paraphrase of the Bible . . . . .	72
VII. Why Latin culture took no hold on the Saxons— Reasons drawn from the Saxon conquest—Bede, Alcuin, Alfred—Translations—Chronicles— Compilations—Impotence of Latin writers— Reasons drawn from the Saxon character— Adhelm—Alcuin—Latin verse—Poetic dia- logues—Bad taste of the Latin writers . . .	82

## CONTENTS.

ix

<b>VIII.</b>	Contrast of German and Latin races—Character of the Saxon race—Its endurance under the Norman conquest . . . . .	<b>92</b>
--------------	--	-----------

## CHAPTER II.

### *The Normans.*

<b>I.</b>	Formation and character of Feudalism . . . . .	<b>95</b>
<b>II.</b>	The Norman invasion; character of the Normans—Contrast with the Saxons—The Normans are French—How they became so—Their taste and architecture—Their spirit of inquiry and their literature—Chivalry and amusements—Their tactics and their success . . . . .	<b>96</b>
<b>III.</b>	Bent of the French genius—Two principal characteristics; clear and consecutive ideas—Psychological form of French genius—Prosaic histories; lack of colour and passion, ease and discursiveness—Natural logic and clearness, soberness, grace and delicacy, refinement and cynicism—Order and charm—The nature of the beauty and of the ideas which the French have introduced . . . . .	<b>104</b>
<b>IV.</b>	The Normans in England—Their position and their tyranny—They implant their literature and language—They forget the same—Learn English by degrees—Gradually English becomes galli- cised . . . . .	<b>115</b>
<b>V.</b>	They translate French works into English—Opinion of Sir John Mandeville—Layamon, Robert of Gloucester, Robert de Brunne—They imitate in English the French literature—Moral manuals, chansons, fabliaux, Gestes—Brightness, frivolity, and futility of this French literature—Barbarity and ignorance of the feudal civilisation—Geste	

	PAGE
of Richard Cœur de Lion, and voyages of Sir John Mandeville—Poorness of the literature introduced and implanted in England—Why it has not endured on the Continent or in England . . .	121
VI. The Saxons in England—Endurance of the Saxon nation, and formation of the English constitution—Endurance of the Saxon character, and formation of the English character . . . . .	138
VII-IX. Comparison of the ideal hero in France and England—Fabliaux of Reynard, and ballads of Robin Hood—How the Saxon character makes way for and supports political liberty—Comparison of the condition of the Commons in France and England—Theory of the English constitution, by Sir John Fortescue—How the Saxon constitution makes way for and supports political liberty—Situation of the Church, and precursors of the Reformation in England—Piers Plowman and Wycliffe—How the Saxon character and the situation of the Norman Church made way for religious reform—Incompleteness and importance of the national literature—Why it has not endured . . . . .	145

### CHAPTER III.

#### *The Artu Tongue.*

I. Chaucer—His education—His political and social life—Wherein his talent was serviceable—He paints the second feudal society . . . . .	170
II. How the middle age degenerated—Decline of the serious element in manners, books, and works of art—Need of excitement—Analogies of architecture and literature . . . . .	171

# CONTENTS.

xi

iii.	Wherein Chaucer belongs to the middle-age— Romantic and ornamental poems— <i>Le Roman de la Rose</i> — <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> — <i>Canterbury Tales</i> — Order of description and events— <i>The House of Fame</i> — Fantastic dreams and visions—Love poems— <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> — Exaggerated development of love in the middle age— Why the mind took this path—Mystic love— <i>The Flower and the Leaf</i> — Sensual love— <i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	173
iv.	Wherein Chaucer is French—Satirical and jovial poems— <i>Canterbury Tales</i> — <i>The Wife of Bath</i> and marriage—The mendicant friar and religion— Buffoonery, waggy, and coarseness in the middle-age	193
v.	Wherein Chaucer was English and original—Idea of character and individual—Van Eyck and Chaucer contemporary— Prologue to <i>Canterbury Tales</i> —Portraits of the franklin, monk, miller, citizen, knight, squire, prioress, the good clerk— Connection of events and characters—General idea— Importance of the same—Chaucer a precursor of the Reformation— He halts by the way—Tediousness and Childishness— Causes of this feebleness—His prose, and scholastic notion— How he is isolated in his age	203
vi.	Connection of philosophy and poetry—How general notions failed under the scholastic philosophy— Why poetry failed—Comparison of civilisation and decadence in the middle age, and in Spain—Extinction of the English literature— Translators—Rhyming chroniclers—Didactic poets—Compilers of moralities—Gower—Oocleve—Lydgate—Analogy of taste in costumes, buildings, and literature—Sad notion of fate, and human misery— Hawes—Barclay—Skelton—Elements of the Reformation and of the Renaissance	213





## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

---

### Volume I.

#### Part I.

---

THOMAS CARLYLE, . . . . .	Frontispiece.
SIR WALTER SCOTT, . . . . .	Page 6
CHARLES DARWIN, . . . . .	" 18
JOHN MILTON, . . . . .	" 80
JOHN GOWER, . . . . .	" 119
JOHN WICLIF, . . . . .	" 166
CARDINAL WOLSEY, . . . . .	" 224



## INTRODUCTION.

---

The historian might place himself for a given period, say a series of ages, or in the human soul, or with some particular people; he might study, describe, relate, all the events, all the transformations, all the revolutions which had been accomplished in the internal man; and when he had finished his work, he would have a history of civilisation amongst the people and in the period he had selected.—GIZMOR, *Civilisation in Europe*, p. 25.

HISTORY has been transformed, within a hundred years in Germany, within sixty years in France, and that by the study of their literatures.

It was perceived that a literary work is not a mere individual play of imagination, the isolated caprice of an excited brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners, a manifestation of a certain kind of mind. It was concluded that we might recover, from the monuments of literature, a knowledge of the manner in which men thought and felt centuries ago. The attempt was made, and it succeeded.

Pondering on these modes of feeling and thought, men decided that they were facts of the highest kind. They saw that these facts bore reference to the most important occurrences, that they explained and were explained by them, that it was necessary thenceforth to give them a rank, and a most important rank, in history. This rank they have received, and from that moment history has undergone a complete change: in its subject-matter, its system, its machinery, the appre-

ciation of laws and of causes. It is this change, such as it is and must be, that we shall here endeavour to exhibit.

# I.

Historical documents serve only as a clue to reconstruct the visible individual.

What is your first remark on turning over the great, stiff leaves of a folio, the yellow sheets of a manuscript,—a poem, a code of laws, a confession of faith? This, you say, did not come into existence all alone. It is but a mould, like a fossil shell, an imprint, like one of those shapes embossed in stone by an animal which lived and perished. Under the shell there was an animal, and behind the document there was a man. Why do you study the shell, except to bring before you the animal? So you study the document only to know the man. The shell and the document are lifeless wrecks, valuable only as a clue to the entire and living existence. We must get hold of this existence, endeavour to re-create it. It is a mistake to study the document, as if it were isolated. This were to treat things like a simple scholar, to fall into the error of the bibliomaniac. Neither mythology nor languages exist in themselves; but only men, who arrange words and imagery according to the necessities of their organs and the original bent of their intellects. A dogma is nothing in itself; look at the people who have made it,—a portrait, for instance, of the sixteenth century, say the stern powerful face of an English archbishop or martyr. Nothing exists except through some individual man; it is this individual with whom we must become acquainted. When we have established the parentage of dogmas, or the classification of poems, or the progress of constitutions, or the transformation of idioms, we have only cleared the soil: genuine history is brought into existence only when the historian begins

to unravel, across the lapse of time, the living man, toiling, impassioned, entrenched in his customs, with his voice and features, his gestures and his dress, distinct and complete as he from whom we have just parted in the street. Let us endeavour, then, to annihilate as far as possible this great interval of time, which prevents us from seeing man with our eyes, with the eyes of our head. What have we under the fair glazed pages of a modern poem? A modern poet, who has studied and travelled, a man like Alfred de Musset, Victor Hugo, Lamartine, or Heine, in a black coat and gloves, welcomed by the ladies, and making every evening his fifty bows and his score of bon-mots in society, reading the papers in the morning, lodging as a rule on a second floor; not over gay, because he has nerves, and especially because, in this dense democracy where we choke one another, the discredit of the dignities of office has exaggerated his pretensions while increasing his importance, and because the keenness of his feelings in general disposes him somewhat to believe himself a deity. This is what we take note of under modern *Meditations* or *Sonnets*. Even so, under a tragedy of the seventeenth century we have a poet, like Racine for instance, elegant, staid, a courtier, a fine talker, with a majestic wig and ribboned shoes, at heart a royalist and a Christian, who says, "God has been so gracious to me, that in whatever company I find myself I never have occasion to blush for the gospel or the king;"<sup>1</sup> clever at entertaining the prince, and rendering

<sup>1</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, in her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, p. 25, says, in quoting this passage, "What could be expected from the courtier who could write in these terms to *Madame de Maintenon*."—*Ta*.

for him into good French the "old French of Amyot;" very respectful to the great, always "knowing his place;" as assiduous and reserved at Marly as at Versailles, amidst the regular pleasures of polished and ornate nature, amidst the salutations, graces, airs, and fopperies of the braided lords, who rose early in the morning to obtain the promise of being appointed to some office in case of the death of the present holder, and amongst charming ladies who count their genealogies on their fingers in order to obtain the right of sitting down in the presence of the King or Queen. On that head consult St. Simon and the engravings of Péréelle, as for the present age you have consulted Balzac and the water-colours of Eugène Lami. Similarly, when we read a Greek tragedy, our first care should be to realise to ourselves the Greeks, that is, the men who live half naked, in the gymnasia, or in the public squares, under a glowing sky, face to face with the most beautiful and the most noble landscapes, bent on making their bodies lithe and strong, on conversing, discussing, voting, carrying on patriotic piracies, nevertheless lazy and temperate, with three urns for their furniture, two anchovies in a jar of oil for their food, waited on by slaves, so as to give them leisure to cultivate their understanding and exercise their limbs, with no desire beyond that of having the most beautiful town, the most beautiful processions, the most beautiful ideas, the most beautiful men. On this subject, a statue such as the Meleager or the Theseus of the Parthenon, or still more, the sight of the Mediterranean, blue and lustrous as a silken tunic, and the islands that stud it with their massive marble outlines: add to these twenty select phrases from Plato and Aristophanes, and they will teach you much more than a multi-

tude of dissertations and commentaries. And so again, in order to understand an Indian Purāna, begin by imagining to yourself the father of a family, who, "having seen a son on his son's knees," retires, according to the law, into solitude, with an axe and a pitcher under a banyan tree, by the brook-side, talks no more, adds fast to fast, dwells naked between four fires, and under that terrible sun, which devours and renews without end all things living; who, for weeks at a time, fixes his imagination first upon the feet of Brahma, next upon his knee, next upon his thigh, next upon his navel, and so on, until, beneath the strain of this intense meditation, hallucinations begin to appear, until all the forms of existence, mingled and transformed the one with the other, quaver before a sight dazzled and giddy, until the motionless man, catching in his breath, with fixed gaze, beholds the universe vanishing like a smoke in the universal void of Being into which he hopes to be absorbed. To this end a voyage to India would be the best instructor; or for want of better, the accounts of travellers, books of geography, botany, ethnology, will serve their turn. In each case the search must be the same. Language, legislation, creeds, are only abstract things: the complete thing is the man who acts, the man corporeal and visible, who eats, walks, fights, labours. Leave aside the theory and the mechanism of constitutions, religions and their systems, and try to see men in their workshops, in their offices, in their fields, with their sky and soil, their houses, their dress, cultivations, meals, as you do when, landing in England or Italy, you look at faces and motions, roads and inns, a citizen taking his walk, a workman drinking. Our great care should

be to supply as much as possible the want of present, personal, direct, and sensible observation which we can no longer practise ; for it is the only means of knowing men. Let us make the past present : in order to judge of a thing, it must be before us ; there is no experience in respect of what is absent. Doubtless this reconstruction is always incomplete ; it can produce only incomplete judgments ; but that we cannot help. It is better to have an imperfect knowledge than none at all ; and there is no other means of acquainting ourselves approximately with the events of other days, than to *see* approximately the men of other days.

This is the first step in history ; it was made in Europe at the revival of imagination, toward the close of the last century, by Lessing and Walter Scott ; a little later in France, by Chateaubriand, Augustin Thierry, Michelet, and others. And now for the second step.

## II.

The outer man is only a clue to study the inner, invisible man.

When you consider with your eyes the visible man, what do you look for ? The man invisible. The words which enter your ears, the gestures, the motions of his head, the clothes he wears, visible acts and deeds of every kind, are expressions merely ; somewhat is revealed beneath them, and that is a soul. An inner man is concealed beneath the outer man ; the second does but reveal the first. You look at his house, furniture, dress ; and that in order to discover in them the marks of his habits and tastes, the degree of his refinement or rusticity, his extravagance or his economy, his stupidity or his acuteness. You listen to his conversation, and you note the inflexions of his voice, the changes in his





*SIR WALTER SCOTT*



*SIR WALTER SCOTT*





attitudes ; and that in order to judge of his vivacity, his self-forgetfulness or his gaiety, his energy or his constraint. You consider his writings, his artistic productions, his business transactions or political ventures ; and that in order to measure the scope and limits of his intelligence, his inventiveness, his coolness, to find out the order, the character, the general force of his ideas, the mode in which he thinks and resolves. All these externals are but avenues converging towards a centre ; you enter them simply in order to reach that centre ; and that centre is the genuine man, I mean that mass of faculties and feelings which are the inner man. We have reached a new world, which is infinite, because every action which we see involves an infinite association of reasonings, emotions, sensations new and old, which have served to bring it to light, and which, like great rocks deep-seated in the ground, find in it their end and their level. This underworld is a new subject-matter, proper to the historian. If his critical education is sufficient, he can lay bare, under every detail of architecture, every stroke in a picture, every phrase in a writing, the special sensation whence detail, stroke, or phrase had issue ; he is present at the drama which was enacted in the soul of artist or writer ; the choice of a word, the brevity or length of a sentence, the nature of a metaphor, the accent of a verse, the development of an argument—everything is a symbol to him ; while his eyes read the text, his soul and mind pursue the continuous development and the everchanging succession of the emotions and conceptions out of which the text has sprung : in short, he works out its psychology. If you would observe this operation, consider the originator and model of all grand contemporary culture, Goethe,

who, before writing *Iphigenia*, employed day after day in making drawings of the most finished statues, and who at last, his eyes filled with the noble forms of ancient scenery, his mind penetrated by the harmonious loveliness of antique life, succeeded in reproducing so exactly in himself the habits and peculiarities of the Greek imagination, that he gives us almost the twin sister of the Antigone of Sophocles, and the goddesses of Phidias. This precise and proved interpretation of past sensations has given to history, in our days, a second birth; hardly anything of the sort was known to the preceding century. They thought men of every race and century were all but identical; the Greek, the barbarian, the Hindoo, the man of the Renaissance, and the man of the eighteenth century, as if they had been turned out of a common mould; and all in conformity to a certain abstract conception, which served for the whole human race. They knew man, but not men; they had not penetrated to the soul; they had not seen the infinite diversity and marvellous complexity of souls; they did not know that the moral constitution of a people or an age is as particular and distinct as the physical structure of a family of plants or an order of animals. Now-a-days, history, like zoology, has found its anatomy; and whatever the branch of history to which you devote yourself, philology, linguistic lore, mythology, it is by these means you must strive to produce new fruit. Amid so many writers who, since the time of Herder, Ottfried Müller, and Goethe, have continued and still improve this great method, let the reader consider only two historians and two works, Carlyle's *Cromwell*, and Sainte-Beuve's *Port-Royal*: he will see with what fairness, exactness, depth of insight, a man may discover a soul



beneath its actions and its works ; how behind the old general, in place of a vulgar hypocritical schemer, we recover a man troubled with the obscure reveries of a melancholic imagination, but with practical instincts and faculties, English to the core, strange and incomprehensible to one who has not studied the climate and the race ; how, with about a hundred meagre letters and a score of mutilated speeches, we may follow him from his farm and team, to the general's tent and to the Protector's throne, in his transmutation and development, in his pricks of conscience and his political sagacity, until the machinery of his mind and actions becomes visible, and the inner tragedy, ever changing and renewed, which exercised this great, darkling soul, passes, like one of Shakspeare's, through the soul of the looker-on. He will see (in the other case) how, behind the squabbles of the monastery, or the contumacies of nuns, he may find a great province of human psychology ; how about fifty characters, that had been buried under the uniformity of a circumspect narrative, reappear in the light of day, each with its own specialty and its countless diversities ; how, beneath theological disquisitions and monotonous sermons, we can unearth the beatings of living hearts, the convulsions and apathies of monastic life, the unforeseen reassertions and wavy turmoil of nature, the inroads of surrounding worldliness, the intermittent victories of grace, with such a variety of lights and shades, that the most exhaustive description and the most elastic style can hardly gather the inexhaustible harvest, which the critic has caused to spring up on this abandoned field. And so it is throughout. Germany, with its genius so pliant, so comprehensive, so apt for transformation, so well calculated to reproduce the most

remote and anomalous conditions of human thought; England, with its intellect so precise, so well calculated to grapple closely with moral questions, to render them exact by figures, weights and measures, geography, statistics, by quotation and by common sense; France, with her Parisian culture, with her drawing-room manners, with her untiring analysis of characters and actions, her irony so ready to hit upon a weakness, her finesse so practised in the discrimination of shades of thought;—all have worked the same soil, and we begin to understand that there is no region of history where it is not imperative to till this deep level, if we would see a serviceable harvest rise between the furrows.

This is the second step; we are in a fair way to its completion. It is the fit work of the contemporary critic. No one has done it so justly and grandly as Sainte-Beuve: in this respect we are all his pupils; his method has revolutionised, in our days, in books, and even in newspapers, every kind of literary, of philosophical and religious criticism. From it we must set out in order to begin the further development. I have more than once endeavoured to indicate this development; there is here, in my mind, a new path open to history, and I will try to describe it more in detail.

### III.

The state and the actions of the inner and invisible man have their causes in certain general ways of thought and feeling.

When you have observed and noted in man one, two, three, then a multitude of sensations, does this suffice, or does your knowledge appear complete? Is Psychology only a series of observations? No; here as elsewhere we must search out the causes after we have collected the facts. No matter if the facts be

physical or moral, they all have their causes ; there is a cause for ambition, for courage, for truth, as there is for digestion, for muscular movement, for animal heat. Vice and virtue are products, like vitriol and sugar ; and every complex phenomenon arises from other more simple phenomena on which it hangs. Let us then seek the simple phenomena for moral qualities, as we seek them for physical qualities ; and let us take the first fact that presents itself : for example, religious music, that of a Protestant Church. There is an inner cause which has turned the spirit of the faithful toward these grave and monotonous melodies, a cause broader than its effect ; I mean the general idea of the true, external worship which man owes to God. It is this which has modelled the architecture of Protestant places of worship, thrown down the statues, removed the pictures, destroyed the ornaments, curtailed the ceremonies, shut up the worshippers in high pews which prevent them from seeing anything, and regulated the thousand details of decoration, posture, and general externals. This again comes from another more general cause, the idea of human conduct in all its comprehensiveness, internal and external, prayers, actions, duties of every kind which man owes to God ; it is this which has enthroned the doctrine of grace, lowered the status of the clergy, transformed the sacraments, suppressed various practices, and changed religion from a discipline to a morality. This second idea in its turn depends upon a third still more general, that of moral perfection, such as is met with in the perfect God, the unerring judge, the stern watcher of souls, before whom every soul is sinful, worthy of punishment, incapable of virtue or salvation, except by the power of conscience which

He calls forth, and the renewal of heart which He produces. That is the master idea, which consists in erecting duty into an absolute king of human life, and in prostrating all ideal models before a moral model. Here we track the root of man ; for to explain this conception it is necessary to consider the race itself, the German and Northman, the structure of his character and mind, his general processes of thought and feeling, the sluggishness and coldness of sensation which prevent his falling easily and headlong under the sway of pleasure, the bluntness of his taste, the irregularity and revolutions of his conception, which arrest in him the birth of fair dispositions and harmonious forms, the disdain of appearances, the desire for truth, the attachment to bare and abstract ideas, which develop in him conscience, at the expense of all else. There the search is at an end ; we have arrived at a primitive disposition ; at a feature peculiar to all the sensations, and to all the conceptions of a century or a race, at a particularity inseparable from all the motions of his intellect and his heart. Here lie the grand causes, for they are the universal and permanent causes, present at every moment and in every case, everywhere and always acting, indestructible, and finally infallibly supreme, since the accidents which thwart them, being limited and partial, end by yielding to the dull and incessant repetition of their efforts ; in such a manner that the general structure of things, and the grand features of events, are their work ; and religions, philosophies, poetries, industries, the framework of society and of families, are in fact only the imprints stamped by their seal.

## IV.

There is, then, a system in human sentiments and ideas: and this system has for its motive power certain general traits, certain characteristics of the intellect and the heart common to men of one race, age, or country. As in mineralogy the crystals, however diverse, spring from certain simple physical forms, so in history, civilisations, however diverse, are derived from certain simple spiritual forms. The one are explained by a primitive geometrical element, as the others are by a primitive psychological element. In order to master the classification of mineralogical systems, we must first consider a regular and general solid, its sides and angles, and observe in this the numberless transformations of which it is capable. So, if you would realise the system of historical varieties, consider first a human soul generally, with its two or three fundamental faculties, and in this compendium you will perceive the principal forms which it can present. After all, this kind of ideal picture, geometrical as well as psychological, is not very complex, and we speedily see the limits of the outline in which civilisations, like crystals, are constrained to exist.

Chief causes  
of thoughts  
and feelings.  
Their historical  
effects.

What is really the mental structure of man? Images or representations of things, which float within him, exist for a time, are effaced, and return again, after he has been looking upon a tree, an animal, any visible object. This is the subject-matter, the development whereof is double, either speculative or practical, according as the representations resolve themselves into a *general conception* or an *active resolution*. Here we have the whole of man in an abridgment; and in this limited circle human diversities meet, sometimes in the womb of the primordial matter, sometimes in the twofold

primordial development. However minute in their elements, they are enormous in the aggregate, and the least alteration in the factors produces vast alteration in the results. According as the representation is clear and as it were punched out or confused and faintly defined, according as it embraces a great or small number of the characteristics of the object, according as it is violent and accompanied by impulses, or quiet and surrounded by calm, all the operations and processes of the human machine are transformed. So, again, according as the ulterior development of the representation varies, the whole human development varies. If the general conception in which it results is a mere dry notation (in Chinese fashion), language becomes a sort of algebra, religion and poetry dwindle, philosophy is reduced to a kind of moral and practical common sense, science to a collection of utilitarian formulas, classifications, mnemonics, and the whole intellect takes a positive bent. If, on the contrary, the general representation in which the conception results is a poetical and figurative creation, a living symbol, as among the Aryan races, language becomes a sort of delicately-shaded and coloured epic poem, in which every word is a person, poetry and religion assume a magnificent and inexhaustible grandeur, metaphysics are widely and subtly developed, without regard to positive applications; the whole intellect, in spite of the inevitable deviations and shortcomings of its effort, is smitten with the beautiful and the sublime, and conceives an ideal capable by its nobleness and its harmony of rallying round it the tenderness and enthusiasm of the human race. If, again, the general conception in which the representation results is poetical but not graduated;

if man arrives at it not by an uninterrupted gradation, but by a quick intuition; if the original operation is not a regular development, but a violent explosion,—then, as with the Semitic races, metaphysics are absent, religion conceives God only as a king solitary and devouring, science cannot grow, the intellect is too rigid and unbending to reproduce the delicate operations of nature, poetry can give birth only to vehement and grandiose exclamations, language cannot unfold the web of argument and of eloquence, man is reduced to a lyric enthusiasm, an unchecked passion, a fanatical and limited action. In this interval between the particular representation and the universal conception are found the germs of the greatest human differences. Some races, as the classical, pass from the first to the second by a graduated scale of ideas, regularly arranged, and general by degrees; others, as the Germanic, traverse the same ground by leaps, without uniformity, after vague and prolonged groping. Some, like the Romans and English, halt at the first steps; others, like the Hindoos and Germans, mount to the last. If, again, after considering the passage from the representation to the idea, we consider that from the representation to the resolution, we find elementary differences of the like importance and the like order, according as the impression is sharp, as in southern climates, or dull, as in northern; according as it results in instant action, as among barbarians, or slowly, as in civilised nations; as it is capable or not of growth, inequality, persistence, and relations. The whole network of human passions, the chances of peace and public security, the sources of labour and action, spring from hence. Such is the case with all primordial differences: their issues embrace an entire civilisation;

and we may compare them to those algebraical formulas which, in a narrow limit, contain in advance the whole curve of which they form the law. Not that this law is always developed to its issue; there are perturbing forces; but when it is so, it is not that the law was false, but that it was not single. New elements become mingled with the old; great forces from without counteract the primitive. The race emigrates, like the Aryan, and the change of climate has altered in its case the whole economy, intelligence, and organisation of society. The people has been conquered, like the Saxon nation, and a new political structure has imposed on it customs, capacities, and inclinations which it had not. The nation has installed itself in the midst of a conquered people, downtrodden and threatening, like the ancient Spartans; and the necessity of living like troops in the field has violently distorted in an unique direction the whole moral and social constitution. In each case, the mechanism of human history is the same. We continually find, as the original mainspring, some very general disposition of mind and soul, innate and appended by nature to the race, or acquired and produced by some circumstance acting upon the race. These mainsprings, once admitted, produce their effect gradually: I mean that after some centuries they bring the nation into a new condition, religious, literary, social, economic; a new condition which, combined with their renewed effort, produces another condition, sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, and so forth; so that we may regard the whole progress of each distinct civilisation as the effect of a permanent force which, at every stage, varies its operation by modifying the circumstances of its action.



## V.

Three different sources contribute to produce this elementary moral state — RACE, SURROUNDINGS, and EPOCH. What we call the race are the innate and hereditary dispositions which man brings with him into the world, and which, as a rule, are united with the marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body. They vary with various peoples. There is a natural variety of men, as of oxen and horses, some brave and intelligent, some timid and dependent, some capable of superior conceptions and creations, some reduced to rudimentary ideas and inventions, some more specially fitted to special works, and gifted more richly with particular instincts, as we meet with species of dogs better favoured than others,—these for coursing, those for fighting, those for hunting, these again for house dogs or shepherds' dogs. We have here a distinct force,—so distinct, that amidst the vast deviations which the other two motive forces produce in him, one can recognise it still; and a race, like the old Aryans, scattered from the Ganges as far as the Hebrides, settled in every clime, and every stage of civilisation, transformed by thirty centuries of revolutions, nevertheless manifests in its languages, religions, literatures, philosophies, the community of blood and of intellect which to this day binds its offshoots together. Different as they are, their parentage is not obliterated; barbarism, culture and grafting, differences of sky and soil, fortunes good and bad, have laboured in vain: the great marks of the original model have remained, and we find again the two or three principal lineaments of the primitive stamp underneath the secondary imprints which time has laid upon them. There is nothing astonishing in this extra-

The three  
primordial  
forces. —  
RACE.

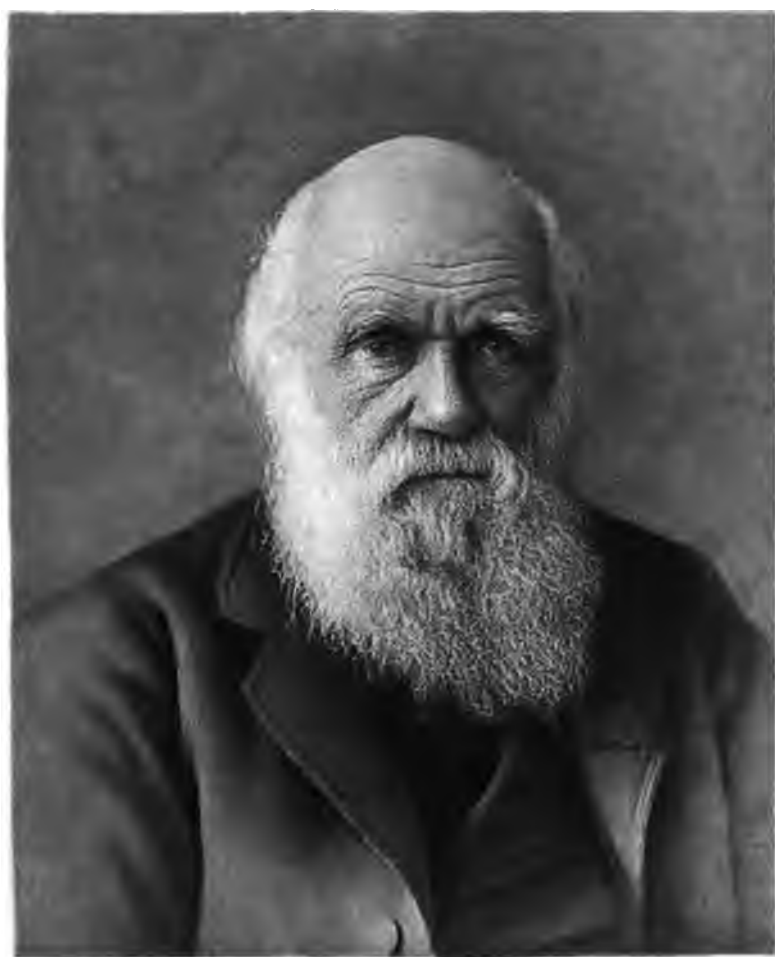
ordinary tenacity. Although the vastness of the distance lets us but half perceive—and by a doubtful light—the origin of species,<sup>1</sup> the events of history sufficiently illumine the events anterior to history, to explain the almost immovable steadfastness of the primordial marks. When we meet with them, fifteen, twenty, thirty centuries before our era, in an Aryan, an Egyptian, a Chinese, they represent the work of a great many ages, perhaps of several myriads of centuries. For as soon as an animal begins to exist, it has to reconcile itself with its surroundings; it breathes and renews itself, is differently affected according to the variations in air, food, temperature. Different climate and situation bring it various needs, and consequently a different course of activity; and this, again, a different set of habits; and still again, a different set of aptitudes and instincts. Man, forced to accommodate himself to circumstances, contracts a temperament and a character corresponding to them; and his character, like his temperament, is so much more stable, as the external impression is made upon him by more numerous repetitions, and is transmitted to his progeny by a more ancient descent. So that at any moment we may consider the character of a people as an abridgment of all its preceding actions and sensations; that is, as a quantity and as a weight, not infinite,<sup>2</sup> since everything in nature is finite, but disproportioned to the rest, and almost impossible to lift, since every moment of an almost infinite past has contributed to increase it, and because, in order to raise the scale, one must place in the opposite scale a still greater number of actions and sensations. Such is the

<sup>1</sup> Darwin, *The Origin of Species*. Prosper Lucas, *de l'Hérédité*.

<sup>2</sup> Spinoza, *Éthica*, Part iv. axiom.



*CHARLES DARWIN*





first and richest source of these master-faculties from which historical events take their rise ; and one sees at the outset, that if it be powerful, it is because this is no simple spring, but a kind of lake, a deep reservoir wherein other springs have, for a multitude of centuries, discharged their several streams.

Having thus outlined the interior structure of a race, ~~Surroundings~~ <sup>idea</sup> we must consider the surroundings in which it exists. For man is not alone in the world ; nature surrounds him, and his fellow-men surround him ; accidental and secondary tendencies overlay his primitive tendencies, and physical or social circumstances disturb or confirm the character committed to their charge. Sometimes the climate has had its effect. Though we can follow but obscurely the Aryan peoples from their common fatherland to their final settlements, we can yet assert that the profound differences which are manifest between the German races on the one side, and the Greek and Latin on the other, arise for the most part from the difference between the countries in which they are settled : some in cold moist lands, deep in rugged marshy forests or on the shores of a wild ocean, beset by melancholy or violent sensations, prone to drunkenness and gluttony, bent on a fighting, blood-spilling life ; others, again, within the loveliest landscapes, on a bright and pleasant sea-coast, enticed to navigation and commerce, exempt from gross cravings of the stomach, inclined from the beginning to social ways, to a settled organisation of the state, to feelings and dispositions such as develop the art of oratory, the talent for enjoyment, the inventions of science, letters, arts. Sometimes the state policy has been at work, as in the two Italian civilisations : the first wholly turned to action, conquest,

government, legislation, on account of the original site of its city of refuge, its border-land emporium, its armed aristocracy, who, by importing and drilling strangers and conquered, created two hostile armies, having no escape from its internal discords and its greedy instincts but in systematic warfare ; the other, shut out from unity and any great political ambition by the stability of its municipal character, the cosmopolitan position of its pope, and the military intervention of neighbouring nations, directed by the whole bent of its magnificent and harmonious genius towards the worship of pleasure and beauty. Sometimes the social conditions have impressed their mark, as eighteen centuries ago by Christianity, and twenty-five centuries ago by Buddhism, when around the Mediterranean, as well as in Hindostan, the extreme results of Aryan conquest and civilisation induced intolerable oppression, the subjugation of the individual, utter despair, the thought that the world was cursed, with the development of metaphysics and myth, so that man in this dungeon of misery, feeling his heart softened, begot the idea of abnegation, charity, tender love, gentleness, humility, brotherly love—there, in a notion of universal nothingness, here under the Fatherhood of God. Look around you upon the regulating instincts and faculties implanted in a race—in short, the mood of intelligence in which it thinks and acts at the present time : you will discover most often the work of some one of these prolonged situations, these surrounding circumstances, persistent and gigantic pressures, brought to bear upon an aggregate of men who, singly and together, from generation to generation, are continually moulded and modelled by their action ; in Spain, a crusade against the Mussulmans which lasted eight cen-



turies, protracted even beyond and until the exhaustion of the nation by the expulsion of the Moors, the spoliation of the Jews, the establishment of the Inquisition, the Catholic wars ; in England, a political establishment of eight centuries, which keeps a man erect and respectful, in independence and obedience, and accustoms him to strive unitedly, under the authority of the law ; in France, a Latin organisation, which, imposed first upon docile barbarians, then shattered in the universal crash, was reformed from within under a lurking conspiracy of the national instinct, was developed under hereditary kings, ends in a sort of levelling republic, centralised, administrative, under dynasties exposed to revolution. These are the most efficacious of the visible causes which mould the primitive man : they are to nations what education, career, condition, abode, are to individuals ; and they seem to comprehend everything, since they comprehend all external powers which mould human matter, and by which the external acts on the internal.

There is yet a third rank of causes ; for, with the ~~forces~~ <sup>forces</sup> within and without, there is the work which they have already produced together, and this work itself contributes to produce that which follows. Beside the permanent impulse and the given surroundings, there is the acquired momentum. When the national character and surrounding circumstances operate, it is not upon a *tabula rasa*, but on a ground on which marks are already impressed. According as one takes the ground at one moment or another, the imprint is different ; and this is the cause that the total effect is different. Consider, for instance, two epochs of a literature or art,—French tragedy under Corneille and under Vol-

taire, the Greek drama under *Æschylus* and under *Euripides*, Italian painting under da Vinci and under Guido. Truly, at either of these two extreme points the general idea has not changed; it is always the same human type which is its subject of representation or painting; the mould of verse, the structure of the drama, the form of body has endured. But among several differences there is this, that the one artist is the precursor, the other the successor; the first has no model, the second has; the first sees objects face to face, the second sees them through the first; that many great branches of art are lost, many details are perfected, that simplicity and grandeur of impression have diminished, pleasing and refined forms have increased,—in short, that the first work has influenced the second. Thus it is with a people as with a plant; the same sap, under the same temperature, and in the same soil, produces, at different steps of its progressive development, different formations, buds, flowers, fruits, seed-vessels, in such a manner that the one which follows must always be preceded by the former, and must spring up from its death. And if now you consider no longer a brief epoch, as our own time, but one of those wide intervals which embrace one or more centuries, like the middle ages, or our last classic age, the conclusion will be similar. A certain dominant idea has had sway; men, for two, for five hundred years, have taken to themselves a certain ideal model of man: in the middle ages, the knight and the monk; in our classic age, the courtier, the man who speaks well. This creative and universal idea is displayed over the whole field of action and thought; and after covering the world with its involuntarily systematic works, it has faded, it has died away,

and lo, a new idea springs up, destined to a like domination, and as manifold creations. And here remember that the second depends in part upon the first, and that the first, uniting its effect with those of national genius and surrounding circumstances, imposes on each new creation its bent and direction. The great historical currents are formed after this law—the long dominations of one intellectual pattern, or a master idea, such as the period of spontaneous creations called the Renaissance, or the period of oratorical models called the Classical Age, or the series of mystical systems called the Alexandrian and Christian eras, or the series of mythological efflorescences which we meet with in the infancy of the German people, of the Indian and the Greek. Here as elsewhere we have but a mechanical problem; the total effect is a result, depending entirely on the magnitude and direction of the producing causes. The only difference which separates these moral problems from physical ones is, that the magnitude and direction cannot be valued or computed in the first as in the second. If a need or a faculty is a quantity, capable of degrees, like a pressure or a weight, this quantity is not measurable like the pressure or the weight. We cannot define it in an exact or approximative formula; we cannot have more, or give more, in respect of it, than a literary impression; we are limited to marking and quoting the salient points by which it is manifested, and which indicate approximately and roughly the part of the scale which is its position. But though the means of notation are not the same in the moral and physical sciences, yet as in both the matter is the same, equally made up of forces, magnitudes, and directions, we may say that in both

History is a mechanical and psychological problem. Within certain limits man can foretell.

the final result is produced after the same method. It is great or small, as the fundamental forces are great or small and act more or less exactly in the same sense, according as the distinct effects of race, circumstance, and epoch combine to add the one to the other, or to annul one another. Thus are explained the long impotences and the brilliant triumphs which make their appearance irregularly and without visible cause in the life of a people; they are caused by internal concords or contrarieties. There was such a concord when in the seventeenth century the sociable character and the conversational aptitude, innate in France, encountered the drawing-room manners and the epoch of oratorical analysis; when in the nineteenth century the profound and pliant genius of Germany encountered the age of philosophical systems and of cosmopolitan criticism. There was such a contrariety when in the seventeenth century the harsh and lonely English genius tried blunderingly to adopt a new-born politeness; when in the sixteenth century the lucid and prosaic French spirit tried vainly to bring forth a living poetry. That hidden concord of creative forces produced the finished urbanity and the noble and regular literature under Louis XIV. and Bossuet, the grand metaphysics and broad critical sympathy of Hegel and Goethe. That hidden contrariety of creative forces produced the imperfect literature, the scandalous comedy, the abortive drama under Dryden and Wycherley, the feeble Greek importations, the groping elaborate efforts, the scant half-graces under Ronsard and the Pleiad. So much we can say with confidence, that the unknown creations towards which the current of the centuries conducts us, will be raised up and regulated altogether by the three

primordial forces ; that if these forces could be measured and computed, we might deduce from them as from a formula the characteristics of future civilisation ; and that if, in spite of the evident crudeness of our notations, and the fundamental inexactness of our measures, we try now to form some idea of our general destiny, it is upon an examination of these forces that we must base our prophecy. For in enumerating them, we traverse the complete circle of the agencies ; and when we have considered RACE, SURROUNDINGS, and EPOCH, which are the internal mainsprings, the external pressure, and the acquired momentum, we have exhausted not only the whole of the actual causes, but also the whole of the possible causes of motion.

## VI.

It remains for us to examine how these causes, when applied to a nation or an age, produce their results. As a spring, rising from a height and flowing downwards spreads its streams, according to the depth of the descent, stage after stage, until it reaches the lowest level of the soil, so the disposition of intellect or soul impressed on a people by race, circumstance, or epoch, spreads in different proportions and by regular descents, down the diverse orders of facts which make up its civilisation.<sup>1</sup> If we arrange the map of a country, starting from the watershed, we find that below this common point the streams are divided into five or six principal basins,

Production  
of the results  
of a primordial  
cause.  
Common  
elements.  
Composition  
of groups.  
Law of  
mutual de-  
pendence.  
Law of pro-  
portional  
influences.

<sup>1</sup> For this scale of co-ordinate effects, consult Renan, *Langues Sténiques*, ch. i. ; Mommsen, *Comparison between the Greek and Roman Civilisations*, ch. ii. vol. i. 3d ed. ; Tocqueville, *Conséquences de la Démocratie en Amérique*, vol. iii.

then each of these into several secondary basins, and so on, until the whole country with its thousand details is included in the ramifications of this network. So, if we arrange the psychological map of the events and sensations of a human civilisation, we find first of all five or six well-defined provinces—religion, art, philosophy, the state, the family, the industries; then in each of these provinces natural departments; and in each of these, smaller territories, until we arrive at the numberless details of life such as may be observed within and around us every day. If now we examine and compare these diverse groups of facts, we find first of all that they are made up of parts, and that all have parts in common. Let us take first the three chief works of human intelligence—religion, art, philosophy. What is a philosophy but a conception of nature and its primordial causes, under the form of abstractions and formulas? What is there at the bottom of a religion or of an art but a conception of this same nature and of these same causes under form of symbols more or less precise, and personages more or less marked; with this difference, that in the first we believe that they exist, in the second we believe that they do not exist? Let the reader consider a few of the great creations of the intelligence in India, Scandinavia, Persia, Rome, Greece, and he will see that, throughout, art is a kind of philosophy made sensible, religion a poem taken for true, philosophy an art and a religion dried up, and reduced to simple ideas. There is therefore, at the core of each of these three groups, a common element, the conception of the world and its principles; and if they differ among themselves, it is because each combines with the common, a distinct element: now the power of abstraction, again the power

to personify and to believe, and finally the power to personify and not believe. Let us now take the two chief works of human association, the family and the state. What forms the state but a sentiment of obedience, by which the many unite under the authority of a chief? And what forms the family but the sentiment of obedience by which wife and children act under the direction of a father and husband? The family is a natural state, primitive and restrained, as the state is an artificial family, ulterior and expanded; and underneath the differences arising from the number, origin, and condition of its members, we discover in the small society as in the great, a like disposition of the fundamental intelligence which assimilates and unites them. Now suppose that this element receives from circumstance, race, or epoch certain special marks, it is clear that all the groups into which it enters will be modified proportionately. If the sentiment of obedience is merely fear,<sup>1</sup> you will find, as in most Oriental states, a brutal despotism, exaggerated punishment, oppression of the subject, servility of manners, insecurity of property, impoverished production, the slavery of women, and the customs of the harem. If the sentiment of obedience has its root in the instinct of order, sociality, and honour, you will find, as in France, a perfect military organisation, a fine administrative hierarchy, a want of public spirit with occasional jerks of patriotism, ready docility of the subject with a revolutionary impatience, the cringing courtier with the counter-efforts of the high-bred man, the refined pleasure of conversation and society on the one hand, and the worry at the fireside and among the family on the other, the equality of

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu, *Esprit des Loix, Principes des trois gouvernements.*

husband and wife, the imperfection of the married state, and consequently the necessary constraint of the law. If, again, the sentiment of obedience has its root in the instinct of subordination and the idea of duty, you will find, as among the Germans, security and happiness in the household, a solid basis of domestic life, a tardy and incomplete development of social and conversational life, an innate respect for established dignities, a superstitious reverence for the past, the keeping up of social inequalities, natural and habitual regard for the law. So in a race, according as the aptitude for general ideas varies, religion, art, and philosophy vary. If man is naturally inclined to the widest universal conceptions, and apt to disturb them at the same time by the nervous delicacy of his over-sensitive organisation, you will find, as in India, an astonishing abundance of gigantic religious creations, a glowing outgrowth of vast and transparent epic poems, a strange tangle of subtle and imaginative philosophies, all so well interwoven, and so penetrated with a common essence, as to be instantly recognised, by their breadth, their colouring, and their want of order, as the products of the same climate and the same intelligence. If, on the other hand, a man naturally staid and balanced in mind limits of his own accord the scope of his ideas, in order the better to define their form, you will find, as in Greece, a theology of artists and tale-tellers; distinctive gods, soon considered distinct from things, and transformed, almost at the outset, into recognised personages; the sentiment of universal unity all but effaced, and barely preserved in the vague notion of Destiny; a philosophy rather close and delicate than grand and systematic, with shortcomings in higher



metaphysics,<sup>1</sup> but incomparable for logic, sophistry, and morals; poetry and arts superior for clearness, artlessness, just proportions, truth, and beauty, to all that have ever been known. If, once more, man, reduced to narrow conceptions, and deprived of all speculative refinement, is at the same time altogether absorbed and straitened by practical occupations, you will find, as in Rome, rudimentary deities, mere hollow names, serving to designate the trivial details of agriculture, generation, household concerns, customs about marriage, rural life, producing a mythology, hence a philosophy, a poetry, either worth nothing or borrowed. Here, as everywhere, the law of mutual dependence<sup>2</sup> comes into play. A civilisation forms a body, and its parts are connected with each other like the parts of an organic body. As in an animal, instincts, teeth, limbs, osseous structure, muscular envelope, are mutually connected, so that a change in one produces a corresponding change in the rest, and a clever naturalist can by a process of reasoning reconstruct out of a few fragments almost the whole body; even so in a civilisation, religion, philosophy, the organisation of the family, literature, the arts, make up a system in which every local change induces a general change, so that an experienced historian, studying some particular part of it, sees in advance and half predicts the character of the rest. There is nothing vague in this interdependence. In the living body the regulator

<sup>1</sup> The Alexandrian philosophy had its birth from the West. The metaphysical notions of Aristotle are isolated; moreover, with him as with Plato, they are but a sketch. By way of contrast consider the systematic vigour of Plotinus, Proclus, Schelling, and Hegel, or the wonderful boldness of Brahminical and Buddhistic speculation.

<sup>2</sup> I have endeavoured on several occasions to give expression to this law, notably in the preface to *Essais de Critique et d'Histoire*.

is, first, its tendency to manifest a certain primary type ; then its necessity for organs whereby to satisfy its wants and to be in harmony with itself in order that it may live. In a civilisation, the regulator is the presence, in every great human creation, of a productive element, present also in other surrounding creations,—to wit, some faculty, aptitude, disposition, effective and discernible, which, being possessed of its proper character, introduces it into all the operations in which it assists, and, according to its variations, causes all the works in which it co-operates to vary also.

## VII.

*Law of formation of a group. Examples and indications.*

At this point we can obtain a glimpse of the principal features of human transformations, and begin to search for the general laws which regulate, not events only, but classes of events, not such and such religion or literature, but a group of literatures or religions. If, for instance, it were admitted that a religion is a metaphysical poem, accompanied by belief ; and remarking at the same time that there are certain epochs, races, and circumstances in which belief, the poetical and metaphysical faculty, show themselves with an unwonted vigour ; if we consider that Christianity and Buddhism were produced at periods of high philosophical conceptions, and amid such miseries as raised up the fanatics of the Cévennes ; if we recognise, on the other hand, that primitive religions are born at the awakening of human reason, during the richest blossoming of human imagination, at a time of the fairest artlessness and the greatest credulity ; if we consider, also, that Mohammedanism appeared with the dawning of poetic prose, and the conception of national unity,

amongst a people destitute of science, at a period of sudden development of the intellect,—we might then conclude that a religion is born, declines, is reformed and transformed according as circumstances confirm and combine with more or less exactitude and force its three generative instincts; and we should understand why it is endemic in India, amidst imaginative, philosophic, eminently fanatic brains; why it blossomed forth so strangely and grandly in the middle ages, amidst an oppressive organisation, new tongues and literatures; why it was aroused in the sixteenth century with a new character and heroic enthusiasm, amid universal regeneration, and during the awakening of the German races; why it breaks out into eccentric sects amid the coarse American democracy, and under the bureaucratic Russian despotism; why, in short, it is spread, at the present day, over Europe in such different dimensions and such various characteristics, according to the differences of race and civilisation. And so for every kind of human production—for literature, music, the fine arts, philosophy, science, the state, industries, and the rest. Each of these has for its direct cause a moral disposition, or a combination of moral dispositions: the cause given, they appear; the cause withdrawn, they vanish: the weakness or intensity of the cause measures their weakness or intensity. They are bound up with their causes, as a physical phenomenon with its condition, as the dew with the fall of the variable temperature, as dilatation with heat. There are similarly connected data in the moral as in the physical world, as rigorously bound together, and as universally extended in the one as in the other. Whatever in the one case produces, alters, or suppresses the first term, produces, alters, or

suppresses the second as a necessary consequence. Whatever lowers the surrounding temperature, deposits the dew. Whatever develops credulity side by side with a poetical conception of the world, engenders religion. Thus phenomena have been produced; thus they will be produced. As soon as we know the sufficient and necessary condition of one of these vast occurrences, our understanding grasps the future as well as the past. We can say with confidence in what circumstances it will reappear, foretell without presumption many portions of its future history, and sketch cautiously some features of its ulterior development.

## VIII.

General  
problem and  
future of his-  
tory. Psy-  
chological  
method.  
Value of  
literature.  
Purpose in  
writing this  
book.

History now attempts, or rather is very near attempting this method of research. The question propounded now-a-days is of this kind. Given a literature, philosophy, society, art, group of arts, what is the moral condition which produced it? what the conditions of race, epoch, circumstance, the most fitted to produce this moral condition? There is a distinct moral condition for each of these formations, and for each of their branches; one for art in general, one for each kind of art—for architecture, painting, sculpture, music, poetry; each has its special germ in the wide field of human psychology; each has its law, and it is by virtue of this law that we see it raised, by chance, as it seems, wholly alone, amid the miscarriage of its neighbours, like painting in Flanders and Holland in the seventeenth century, poetry in England in the sixteenth, music in Germany in the eighteenth. At this moment, and in these countries, the conditions have been fulfilled for one art, not for others, and a single branch

has budded in the general barrenness. History must search now-a-days for these rules of human growth; with the special psychology of each special formation it must occupy itself; the finished picture of these characteristic conditions it must now labour to compose. No task is more delicate or more difficult; Montesquieu tried it, but in his time history was too new to admit of his success; they had not yet even a suspicion of the road necessary to be travelled, and hardly now do we begin to catch sight of it. Just as in its elements astronomy is a mechanical and physiology a chemical problem, so history in its elements is a psychological problem. There is a particular system of inner impressions and operations which makes an artist, a believer, a musician, a painter, a man in a nomadic or social state; and of each the birth and growth, the energy, the connection of ideas and emotions, are different: each has his moral history and his special structure, with some governing disposition and some dominant feature. To explain each, it would be necessary to write a chapter of psychological analysis, and barely yet has such a method been rudely sketched. One man alone, Stendhal, with a peculiar bent of mind and a strange education, has undertaken it, and to this day the majority of readers find his books paradoxical and obscure: his talent and his ideas were premature; his admirable divinations were not understood, any more than his profound sayings thrown out cursorily, or the astonishing precision of his system and of his logic. It was not perceived that, under the exterior of a conversationalist and a man of the world, he explained the most complicated of esoteric mechanisms; that he laid his finger on the mainsprings; that he introduced into

the history of the heart scientific processes, the art of notation, decomposition, deduction ; that he first marked the fundamental causes of nationality, climate, temperament ; in short, that he treated sentiments as they should be treated,—in the manner of the naturalist, and of the natural philosopher, who classifies and weighs forces. For this very reason he was considered dry and eccentric : he remained solitary, writing novels, voyages, notes, for which he sought and obtained a score of readers. And yet we find in his books at the present day essays the most suitable to open the path which I have endeavoured to describe. No one has better taught us how to open our eyes and see, to see first the men that surround us and the life that is present, then the ancient and authentic documents, to read between the black and white lines of the pages, to recognise beneath the old impression, under the scribbling of a text, the precise sentiment, the movement of ideas, the state of mind in which they were written. In his writings, in Sainte-Beuve, in the German critics, the reader will see all the wealth that may be drawn from a literary work : when the work is rich, and people know how to interpret it, we find there the psychology of a soul, frequently of an age, now and then of a race. In this light, a great poem, a fine novel, the confessions of a superior man, are more instructive than a heap of historians with their histories. I would give fifty volumes of charters and a hundred volumes of state papers for the memoirs of Cellini, the epistles of St. Paul, the Table-talk of Luther, or the comedies of Aristophanes. In this consists the importance of literary works : they are instructive because they are beautiful ; their utility grows

with their perfection ; and if they furnish documents it is because they are monuments. The more a book brings sentiments into light, the more it is a work of literature ; for the proper office of literature is to make sentiments visible. The more a book represents important sentiments, the higher is its place in literature ; for it is by representing the mode of being of a whole nation and a whole age, that a writer rallies round him the sympathies of an entire age and an entire nation. This is why, amid the writings which set before our eyes the sentiments of preceding generations, a literature, and notably a grand literature, is incomparably the best. It resembles those admirable apparatus of extraordinary sensibility, by which physicians disentangle and measure the most recondite and delicate changes of a body. Constitutions, religions, do not approach it in importance ; the articles of a code of laws and of a creed only show us the spirit roughly and without delicacy. If there are any writings in which politics and dogma are full of life, it is in the eloquent discourses of the pulpit and the tribune, memoirs, unrestrained confessions ; and all this belongs to literature : so that, in addition to itself, it has all the advantage of other works. It is then chiefly by the study of literatures that one may construct a moral history, and advance toward the knowledge of psychological laws, from which events spring.

I intend to write the history of a literature, and to seek in it for the psychology of a people : if I have chosen this nation in particular, it is not without a reason. I had to find a people with a grand and complete literature, and this is rare : there are few nations who have, during their whole existence, really thought

and written. Among the ancients, the Latin literature is worth nothing at the outset, then it borrowed and became imitative. Among the moderns, German literature does not exist for nearly two centuries.<sup>1</sup> Italian literature and Spanish literature end at the middle of the seventeenth century. Only ancient Greece, modern France and England, offer a complete series of great significant monuments. I have chosen England, because being still living, and subject to direct examination, it may be better studied than a destroyed civilisation, of which we retain but the relics, and because, being different from France, it has in the eyes of a Frenchman a more distinct character. Besides, there is a peculiarity in this civilisation, that apart from its spontaneous development, it presents a forced deviation, it has suffered the last and most effectual of all conquests, and the three grounds whence it has sprung, race, climate, the Norman invasion, may be observed in its remains with perfect exactness ; so that we may examine in this history the two most powerful moving springs of human transformation, natural bent and constraining force, and we may examine them without uncertainty or gap, in a series of authentic and unmutilated memorials.

I have endeavoured to define these primary springs, to exhibit their gradual effects, to explain how they have ended by bringing to light great political, religious, and literary works, and by developing the recondite mechanism whereby the Saxon barbarian has been transformed into the Englishman of to-day.

<sup>1</sup> From 1550 to 1750.



# HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

---

## BOOK I.

### THE SOURCE.

---

#### CHAPTER I.

##### *The Saxons.*

##### I.

As you coast the North Sea from the Scheldt to Jutland, you will mark in the first place that the characteristic feature is the want of slope; marsh, waste, shoal; the rivers hardly drag themselves along, swollen and sluggish, with long, black-looking waves; the flooding stream oozes over the banks, and appears further on in stagnant pools. In Holland the soil is but a sediment of mud; here and there only does the earth cover it with a crust, shallow and brittle, the mere alluvium of the river, which the river seems ever about to destroy. Thick clouds hover above, being fed by ceaseless exhalations. They lazily turn their violet flanks, grow black, suddenly descend in heavy showers; the vapour, like a furnace-smoke, crawls for ever on the horizon. Thus watered, plants multiply; in the angle between Jutland and the continent, in a fat muddy soil, "the verdure is as

fresh as that of England.”<sup>1</sup> Immense forests covered the land even after the eleventh century. The sap of this humid country, thick and potent, circulates in man as in the plants; man’s respiration, nutrition, sensations and habits affect also his faculties and his frame.

The land produced after this fashion has one enemy, to wit, the sea. Holland maintains its existence only by virtue of its dykes. In 1654 those in Jutland burst, and fifteen thousand of the inhabitants were swallowed up. One need only see the blast of the North swirl down upon the low level of the soil, wan and ominous:<sup>2</sup> the vast yellow sea dashes against the narrow belt of flat coast which seems incapable of a moment’s resistance; the wind howls and bellows; the sea-mews cry; the poor little ships flee as fast as they can, bending almost to the gunwale, and endeavour to find a refuge in the mouth of the river, which seems as hostile as the sea. A sad and precarious existence, as it were face to face with a beast of prey. The Frisians, in their ancient laws, speak already of the league they have made against “the ferocious ocean.” Even in a calm this sea is unsafe. “Before me rolleth a waste of water . . . and above me go rolling the storm-clouds, the formless dark grey daughters of air, which from the sea, in cloudy buckets scoop up the water, ever wearied lifting and lifting, and then pour it again in the sea, a mournful, wearisome

<sup>1</sup> Malte-Brun, iv. 398. Not counting bays, gulfs, and canals, the sixteenth part of the country is covered by water. The dialect of Jutland bears still a great resemblance to English.

<sup>2</sup> See Ruysdaal’s painting in Mr. Baring’s collection. Of the three Saxon islands, North Strandt, Busen, and Heligoland, North Strandt was inundated by the sea in 1800, 1483, 1532, 1615, and almost destroyed in 1634. Busen is a level plain, beaten by storms, which it has been found necessary to surround by a dyke. Heligoland was laid waste by the sea in 800, 1800, 1500, 1649, the last time so violently that only a portion of it remained.—Turner, *Hist. of Angl. Saxons*, 1852, i. 97.

business. Over the sea, flat on his face, lies the monstrous, terrible North wind, sighing and sinking his voice as in secret, like an old grumbler, for once in good humour, unto the ocean he talks, and he tells her wonderful stories."<sup>1</sup> Rain, wind, and surge leave room for naught but gloomy and melancholy thoughts. The very joy of the billows has in it an inexplicable restlessness and harshness. From Holland to Jutland, a string of small, deluged islands<sup>2</sup> bears witness to their ravages; the shifting sands which the tide drifts up obstruct and impede the banks and entrance of the rivers.<sup>3</sup> The first Roman fleet, a thousand sail, perished there; to this day ships wait a month or more in sight of port, tossed upon the great white waves, not daring to risk themselves in the shifting, winding channel, notorious for its wrecks. In winter a breastplate of ice covers the two streams; the sea drives back the frozen masses as they descend; they pile themselves with a crash upon the sandbanks, and sway to and fro; now and then you may see a vessel, seized as in a vice, split in two beneath their violence. Picture, in this foggy clime, amid hoar-frost and storm, in these marshes and forests, half-naked savages, a kind of wild beasts, fishers and hunters, but especially hunters of men; these are they, Saxons, Angles, Jutes, Frisians;<sup>4</sup> later on, Danes, who during the fifth and the ninth centuries, with their swords and battle-axes, took and kept the island of Britain.

<sup>1</sup> Heine, *The North Sea*, translated by Charles G. Leland. See Tacitus, *Ann.* book 2, for the impressions of the Romans, "truculentia cœli."

<sup>2</sup> Watten, Platen, Sande, Düneninseln.

<sup>3</sup> Nine or ten miles out, near Heligoland, are the nearest soundings of about fifty fathoms.

<sup>4</sup> Palgrave, *Saxon Commonwealth*, vol. i.

A rude and foggy land, like their own, except in the depth of its sea and the safety of its coasts, which one day will call up real fleets and mighty vessels; green England—the word rises to the lips and expresses all. Here also moisture pervades everything; even in summer the mist rises; even on clear days you perceive it fresh from the great sea-girdle, or rising from vast but ever slushy meadows, undulating with hill and dale, intersected with hedges to the limit of the horizon. Here and there a sunbeam strikes on the higher grasses with burning flash, and the splendour of the verdure dazzles and almost blinds you. The overflowing water straightens the flabby stems; they grow up, rank, weak, and filled with sap; a sap ever renewed, for the gray mists creep under a stratum of motionless vapour, and at distant intervals the rim of heaven is drenched by heavy showers. “There are yet commons as at the time of the Conquest, deserted, abandoned,<sup>1</sup> wild, covered with furze and thorny plants, with here and there a horse grazing in solitude. Joyless scene, unproductive soil!<sup>2</sup> What a labour it has been to humanise it! What impression it must have made on the men of the South, the Romans of Cæsar! I thought, when I saw it, of the ancient Saxons, wanderers from West and North, who came to settle in this land of marsh and fogs, on the border of primeval forests, on the banks of these great muddy streams, which roll down their slime to meet the waves.<sup>3</sup> They must have lived as hunters and swineherds; growing, as before, brawny, fierce, gloomy.

<sup>1</sup> *Notes of a Journey in England.*

<sup>2</sup> Léonce de Lavergne, *De l'Agriculture anglaise*. “The soil is much worse than that of France.”

<sup>3</sup> There are at least four rivers in England passing by the name of “Ouse,” which is only another form of “ooze.”—Tr.

Take civilisation from this soil, and there will remain to the inhabitants only war, the chase, gluttony, drunkenness. Smiling love, sweet poetic dreams, art, refined and nimble thought, are for the happy shores of the Mediterranean. Here the barbarian, ill housed in his mud-hovel, who hears the rain pattering whole days among the oak leaves—what dreams can he have, gazing upon his mud-pools and his sombre sky?"

## II.

Huge white bodies, cool-blooded, with fierce blue eyes, reddish flaxen hair; ravenous stomachs, filled with meat and cheese, heated by strong drinks; of a cold temperament, slow to love,<sup>1</sup> home-stayers, prone to brutal drunkenness: these are to this day the features which descent and climate preserve in the race, and these are what the Roman historians discovered in their former country. There is no living, in these lands, without abundance of solid food; bad weather keeps people at home; strong drinks are necessary to cheer them; the senses become blunted, the muscles are braced, the will vigorous. In every country the body of man is rooted deep into the soil of nature; and in this instance still deeper, because, being uncultivated, he is less removed from nature. In Germany, storm-beaten, in wretched boats of hide, amid the hardships and dangers of seafaring life, they were pre-eminently adapted for endurance and enterprise, inured to misfortune, scorers of danger. Pirates at first: of all

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum, passim*: Diem noctemque continuare potando, nulli probrum.—Sera juvenum Venus.—Totos dies juxta focum atque ignem agunt. Dargaud, *Voyage en Danemark*. "They take six meals per day, the first at five o'clock in the morning. One should see the faces and meals at Hamburg and at Amsterdam."

kinds of hunting the man-hunt is most profitable and most noble; they left the care of the land and flocks to the women and slaves; seafaring, war, and pillage<sup>1</sup> was their whole idea of a freeman's work. They dashed to sea in their two-sailed barks, landed anywhere, killed everything; and having sacrificed in honour of their gods the tithe of their prisoners, and leaving behind them the red light of their burnings, went farther on to begin again. "Lord," says a certain litany, "deliver us from the fury of the Jutes." "Of all barbarians<sup>2</sup> these are strongest of body and heart, the most formidable,"—we may add, the most cruelly ferocious. When murder becomes a trade, it becomes a pleasure. About the eighth century, the final decay of the great Roman corpse which Charlemagne had tried to revive, and which was settling down into corruption, called them like vultures to the prey. Those who had remained in Denmark, with their brothers of Norway, fanatical pagans, incensed against the Christians, made a descent on all the surrounding coasts. Their sea-kings,<sup>3</sup> "who had never slept under the smoky rafters of a roof, who had never drained the ale-horn by an inhabited hearth," laughed at wind and storms, and sang: "The blast of the tempest aids our oars; the bellowing of heaven, the howling of the thunder, hurt us not; the hurricane is our servant, and drives us whither we wish to go." "We hewed with our swords," says a song attributed to Ragnar Lodbrog; "was it not like that hour when my bright bride I seated by me on the couch?" One of

<sup>1</sup> Bede, v. 10. Sidonius, viii. 6. Lingard, *Hist. of England*, 1854, i. chap. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Zosimus, iii. 147. Amm. Marcellinus, xxviii. 526.

<sup>3</sup> Aug. Thierry, *Hist. S. Edmundi*, vi. 441. See *Ynglingasaga*, and especially Egil's Saga.

them, at the monastery of Peterborough, kills with his own hand all the monks, to the number of eighty-four; others, having taken King Ælla, divided his ribs from the spine, drew his lungs out, and threw salt into his wounds. Harold Harefoot, having seized his rival Alfred, with six hundred men, had them maimed, blinded, hamstrung, scalped, or embowelled.<sup>1</sup> Torture and carnage, greed of danger, fury of destruction, obstinate and frenzied bravery of an over-strong temperament, the unchaining of the butcherly instincts,—such traits meet us at every step in the old Sagas. The daughter of the Danish Jarl, seeing Egil taking his seat near her, repels him with scorn, reproaching him with “seldom having provided the wolves with hot meat, with never having seen for the whole autumn a raven croaking over the carnage.” But Egil seized her and pacified her by singing: “I have marched with my bloody sword, and the raven has followed me. Furiously we fought, the fire passed over the dwellings of men; we have sent to sleep in blood those who kept the gates.” From such table-talk, and such maidenly tastes, we may judge of the rest.<sup>2</sup>

Behold them now in England, more settled and wealthier: do you expect to find them much changed? Changed it may be, but for the worse, like the Franks,

<sup>1</sup> Lingard, *Hist. of England*, i. 164, says, however, “Every tenth man out of the six hundred received his liberty, and of the rest a few were selected for slavery.”—*Tr.*

<sup>2</sup> Franks, Frisians, Saxons, Danes, Norwegians, Icelanders, are one and the same people. Their language, laws, religion, poetry, differ but little. The more northern continue longest in their primitive manners. Germany in the fourth and fifth centuries, Denmark and Norway in the seventh and eighth, Iceland in the tenth and eleventh centuries, present the same condition, and the monuments of each country will fill up the gaps that exist in the history of the others.

like all barbarians who pass from action to enjoyment. They are more gluttonous, carving their hogs, filling themselves with flesh, swallowing down deep draughts of mead, ale, spiced wines, all the strong, coarse drinks which they can procure, and so they are cheered and stimulated. Add to this the pleasure of the fight. Not easily with such instincts can they attain to culture; to find a natural and ready culture, we must look amongst the sober and sprightly populations of the south. Here the sluggish and heavy<sup>1</sup> temperament remains long buried in a brutal life; people of the Latin race never at a first glance see in them aught but large gross beasts, clumsy and ridiculous when not dangerous and enraged. Up to the sixteenth century, says an old historian, the great body of the nation were little else than herdsmen, keepers of cattle and sheep; up to the end of the eighteenth drunkenness was the recreation of the higher ranks; it is still that of the lower; and all the refinement and softening influence of civilisation have not abolished amongst them the use of the rod and the fist. If the carnivorous, warlike, drinking savage, proof against the climate, still shows beneath the conventions of our modern society and the softness of our modern polish, imagine what he must have been when, landing with his band upon a wasted or desert country, and becoming for the first time a settler, he saw extending to the horizon the common pastures of the border country, and the great primitive forests which furnished stags for the chase and acorns for his pigs. The ancient histories tell us that they had a great and a coarse appetite.<sup>2</sup> Even at the time of the Conquest the custom of drinking to excess

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *De mor. Germ.* xxii. : *Gens nec astuta nec callida.*

<sup>2</sup> W. of Malmesbury. Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 365.



was a common vice with men of the highest rank, and they passed in this way whole days and nights without intermission. Henry of Huntingdon, in the twelfth century, lamenting the ancient hospitality, says that the Norman kings provided their courtiers with only one meal a day, while the Saxon kings used to provide four. One day, when Athelstan went with his nobles to visit his relative Ethelfleda, the provision of mead was exhausted at the first salutation, owing to the copiousness of the draughts; but Dunstan, forecasting the extent of the royal appetite, had furnished the house, so that the cup-bearers, as is the custom at royal feasts, were able the whole day to serve it out in horns and other vessels, and the liquor was not found to be deficient. When the guests were satisfied, the harp passed from hand to hand, and the rude harmony of their deep voices swelled under the vaulted roof. The monasteries themselves in Edgard's time kept up games, songs, and dances till midnight. To shout, to drink, to gesticulate, to feel their veins heated and swollen with wine, to hear and see around them the riotous orgies, this was the first need of the Barbarians.<sup>1</sup> The heavy human brute gluts himself with sensations and with noise.

For such appetites there was a stronger food,—I mean blows and battle. In vain they attached themselves to the soil, became tillers of the ground, in distinct communities and distinct regions, shut up<sup>2</sup> in their march

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum*, xxii. xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Kemble, *Saxons in England*, 1849, i. 70, ii. 184. "The Acts of an Anglo-Saxon parliament are a series of treaties of peace between all the associations which make up the State; a continual revision and renewal of the alliances offensive and defensive of all the free men. They are universally mutual contracts for the maintenance of the trid or peace."

with their kindred and comrades, bound together, separated from the mass, enclosed by sacred landmarks, by primeval oaks on which they cut the figures of birds and beasts, by poles set up in the midst of the marsh, which whosoever removed was punished with cruel tortures. In vain these Marches and Ga's<sup>1</sup> were grouped into states, and finally formed a half-regulated society, with assemblies and laws, under the lead of a single king; its very structure indicates the necessities to supply which it was created. They united in order to maintain peace; treaties of peace occupy their Parliaments; provisions for peace are the matter of their laws. War was waged daily and everywhere; the aim of life was, not to be slain, ransomed, mutilated, pillaged, hung and of course, if it was a woman, violated.<sup>2</sup> Every man was obliged to appear armed, and to be ready, with his burgh or his township, to repel marauders, who went about in bands.<sup>3</sup> The animal was yet too powerful, too impetuous, too untamed. Anger and covetousness in the first place brought him upon his prey. Their history, I mean that of the Heptarchy, is like a history of "kites and crows."<sup>4</sup> They slew the Britons or reduced them to slavery, fought the remnant of the Welsh, Irish, and Picts, massacred one another, were hewn down and cut to pieces by the Danes. In a hundred years, out of fourteen kings of Northumbria,

<sup>1</sup> A large district; the word is still existing in German, as Rheingau, Breisgau.—Tr.

<sup>2</sup> Turner, *Hist. of the Anglo-Sax.* ii. 440, Laws of Ina.

<sup>3</sup> Such a band consisted of thirty-five men or more.

<sup>4</sup> Milton's expression. Lingard's *History*, i. chap. 3. This history bears much resemblance to that of the Franks in Gaul. See Gregory of Tours. The Saxons, like the Franks, somewhat softened, but rather degenerated, were pillaged and massacred by those of their northern brothers who still remained in a savage state.

seven were slain and six deposed. Penda of Mercia killed five kings, and in order to take the town of Bam-borough, demolished all the neighbouring villages, heaped their ruins into an immense pile, sufficient to burn all the inhabitants, undertook to exterminate the Northumbrians, and perished himself by the sword at the age of eighty. Many amongst them were put to death by the thanes; one thane was burned alive; brothers slew one another treacherously. With us civilisation has interposed, between the desire and its fulfilment, the counter-acting and softening preventive of reflection and calculation; here, the impulse is sudden, and murder and every kind of excess spring from it instantaneously. King Edwy<sup>1</sup> having married Elgiva, his relation within the prohibited degrees, quitted the hall where he was drinking on the very day of his coronation, to be with her. The nobles thought themselves insulted, and immediately Abbot Dunstan went himself to seek the young man. "He found the adulteress," says the monk Osbern, "her mother, and the king together on the bed of debauch. He dragged the king thence violently, and setting the crown upon his head, brought him back to the nobles." Afterwards Elgiva sent men to put out Dunstan's eyes, and then, in a revolt, saved herself and the king by hiding in the country; but the men of the North having seized her, "hamstrung her, and then subjected her to the death which she deserved."<sup>2</sup> Barbarity follows barbarity. At Bristol, at the time of the Conquest, as we are told by an historian of the time,<sup>3</sup> it was

<sup>1</sup> Vita S. Dunstani, *Anglia Sacra*, ii.

<sup>2</sup> It is amusing to compare the story of Edwy and Elgiva in Turner, ii. 216, etc., and then in Lingard, i. 132, etc. The first accuses Dunstan, the other defends him.—Tr.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Bishop Wolstun.*

the custom to buy men and women in all parts of England, and to carry them to Ireland for sale in order to make money. The buyers usually made the young women pregnant, and took them to market in that condition, in order to ensure a better price. "You might have seen with sorrow long files of young people of both sexes and of the greatest beauty, bound with ropes, and daily exposed for sale. . . . They sold in this manner as slaves their nearest relatives, and even their own children." And the chronicler adds that, having abandoned this practice, they "thus set an example to all the rest of England." Would you know the manners of the highest ranks, in the family of the last king?<sup>1</sup> At a feast in the king's hall, Harold was serving Edward the Confessor with wine, when Tostig, his brother, moved by envy, seized him by the hair. They were separated. Tostig went to Hereford, where Harold had ordered a royal banquet to be prepared. There he seized his brother's attendants, and cutting off their heads and limbs, he placed them in the vessels of wine, ale, mead, and cider, and sent a message to the king: "If you go to your farm, you will find there plenty of salt meat, but you will do well to carry some more with you." Harold's other brother, Sweyn, had violated the abbess Elgiva, assassinated Beorn the thane, and being banished from the country, had turned pirate. When we regard their deeds of violence, their ferocity, their cannibal jests, we see that they were not far removed from the sea-kings, or from the followers of Odin, who

<sup>1</sup> *Tante sœvitie erant fratres illi quod, cum alicujus nitidam villam conspicerent, dominatorem de nocte interfici juberent, totamque progeniem illius possessionemque defuncti obtinerent.* Turner, iii. 27. Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 367

ate raw flesh, hung men as victims on the sacred trees of Upsala, and killed themselves to make sure of dying as they had lived, in blood. A score of times the old ferocious instinct reappears beneath the thin crust of Christianity. In the eleventh century, Siward,<sup>1</sup> the great Earl of Northumberland, was afflicted with a dysentery; and feeling his death near, exclaimed, "What a shame for me not to have been permitted to die in so many battles, and to end thus by a cow's death! At least put on my breastplate, gird on my sword, set my helmet on my head, my shield in my left hand, my battle-axe in my right, so that a stout warrior, like myself, may die as a warrior." They did as he bade, and thus died he honourably in his armour. They had made one step, and only one, from barbarism.

### III.

Under this native barbarism there were noble dispositions, unknown to the Roman world, which were destined to produce a better people out of its ruins. In the first place, "a certain earnestness, which leads them out of frivolous sentiments to noble ones"<sup>2</sup> From their origin in Germany this is what we find them, severe in manners, with grave inclinations and a manly dignity. They live solitary, each one near the spring or the wood which has taken his fancy.<sup>3</sup> Even in villages the cottages were detached; they must have independence and free air. They had no taste for voluptuousness; love was tardy, education severe, their food simple; all the re-

<sup>1</sup> "Pene gigas statura," says the chronicler. *H. of Huntingdon*, vi. 367. *Kemble*, i. 393. *Turner*, ii. 318.

<sup>2</sup> *Grimm, Mythology*, 53, Preface.

<sup>3</sup> *Tacitus*, xx. xxiii. xi. xii. xiii. *et passim*. We may still see the traces of this taste in English dwellings.

creation they indulged in was the hunting of the aurochs, and a dance amongst naked swords. Violent intoxication and perilous wagers were their weakest points; they sought in preference not mild pleasures, but strong excitement. In everything, even in their rude and masculine instincts, they were men. Each in his own home, on his land and in his hut, was his own master, upright and free, in no wise restrained or shackled. If the commonweal received anything from him, it was because he gave it. He gave his vote in arms in all great conferences, passed judgment in the assembly, made alliances and wars on his own account, moved from place to place, showed activity and daring.<sup>1</sup> The modern Englishman existed entire in this Saxon. If he bends, it is because he is quite willing to bend; he is no less capable of self-denial than of independence; self-sacrifice is not uncommon, a man cares not for his blood or his life. In Homer the warrior often gives way, and is not blamed if he flees. In the Sagas, in the Edda, he must be over-brave; in Germany the coward is drowned in the mud, under a hurdle. Through all outbreaks of primitive brutality gleams obscurely the grand idea of duty, which is, the self-constraint exercised in view of some noble end. Marriage was pure amongst them, chastity instinctive. Amongst the Saxons the adulterer was punished by death; the adulteress was obliged to hang herself, or was stabbed by the knives of her companions. The wives of the Cimbrians, when they could not obtain from Marius assurance of their chastity, slew themselves with their own hands. They thought there was something sacred in a woman; they married but one, and kept faith with her. In fifteen centuries the idea

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *xiii.*

of marriage is unchanged amongst them. The wife, on entering her husband's home, is aware that she gives herself altogether,<sup>1</sup> "that she will have but one body, one life with him; that she will have no thought, no desire beyond: that she will be the companion of his perils and labours; that she will suffer and dare as much as he, both in peace and war." And he, like her, knows that he gives himself. Having chosen his chief, he forgets himself in him, assigns to him his own glory, serves him to the death. "He is infamous as long as he lives, who returns from the field of battle without his chief."<sup>2</sup> It was on this voluntary subordination that feudal society was based. Man in this race, can accept a superior, can be capable of devotion and respect. Thrown back upon himself by the gloom and severity of his climate, he has discovered moral beauty, while others discover sensuous beauty. This kind of naked brute, who lies all day by his fireside, sluggish and dirty, always eating and drinking,<sup>3</sup> whose rusty faculties cannot follow the clear and fine outlines of happily created poetic forms, catches a glimpse of the sublime in his troubled dreams. He does not see it, but simply feels it; his religion is already within, as it will be in the sixteenth century, when he will cast off the sensuous worship imported from Rome, and hallow the faith of the heart.<sup>4</sup> His gods are not enclosed in walls; he has no idols. What he designates by divine names, is something invisible and grand, which floats through nature, and is conceived beyond

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, xix. viii. xvi. Kemble, i. 232.

<sup>2</sup> Tacitus, xiv.

<sup>3</sup> "In omni domo, nudi et sordidi. . . . Plus per otium transigunt, dediti somno, ciboque; totos dies juxta focum atque ignem agunt."

<sup>4</sup> Grimm, 53, Preface. Tacitus, x.

nature,<sup>1</sup> a mysterious infinity which the sense cannot touch, but which "reverence alone can feel;" and when, later on, the legends define and alter this vague divination of natural powers, one idea remains at the bottom of this chaos of giant-dreams, namely, that the world is a warfare, and heroism the highest good.

In the beginning, say the old Icelandic legends,<sup>2</sup> there were two worlds, Niflheim the frozen, and Muspell the burning. From the falling snow-flakes was born the giant Ymir. "There was in times of old, where Ymir dwelt, nor sand nor sea, nor gelid waves; earth existed not, nor heaven above; 'twas a chaotic chasm, and grass nowhere." There was but Ymir, the horrible frozen Ocean, with his children, sprung from his feet and his armpits; then their shapeless progeny, Terrors of the abyss, barren Mountains, Whirlwinds of the North, and other malevolent beings, enemies of the sun and of life; then the cow Andhumbla, born also of melting snow, brings to light, whilst licking the hoar-frost from the rocks, a man Bur, whose grandsons kill the giant Ymir. "From his flesh the earth was formed, and from his bones the hills, the heaven from the skull of that ice-cold giant, and from his blood the sea; but of his brains the heavy clouds are all created." Then arose war between the monsters of winter and the luminous fertile gods, Odin the founder, Baldur the mild and

<sup>1</sup> "Deorum nominibus appellatur secretum illud, quod sola reverentia vident." Later on, at Upsala for instance, they had images (Adam of Bremen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*). Wuotan (Odin) signifies etymologically the All-Powerful, him who penetrates and circulates through everything (Grimm, *Mythol.*)

<sup>2</sup> *Somundar Edda, Snorra Edda*, ed. Copenhagen, three vols. *passim*. Mr. Bergmann has translated several of these poems into French, which Mr. Taine quotes. The translator has generally made use of the edition of Mr. Thorpe, London, 1866.



benevolent, Thor the summer-thunder, who purifies the air, and nourishes the earth with showers. Long fought the gods against the frozen Jötuns, against the dark bestial powers, the Wolf Fenrir, the great Serpent, whom they drown in the sea, the treacherous Loki, whom they bind to the rocks, beneath a viper whose venom drops continually on his face. Long will the heroes, who by a bloody death deserve to be placed "in the halls of Odin, and there wage a combat every day," assist the gods in their mighty war. A day will, however, arrive when gods and men will be conquered. Then

"trembles Yggdrasil's ash yet standing; groans that ancient tree, and the Jötun Loki is loosed. The shadows groan on the ways of Hel,<sup>1</sup> until the fire of Surt has consumed the tree. Hrym steers from the east, the waters rise, the mundane snake is coiled in jötun-rage. The worm beats the water, and the eagle screams; the pale of beak tears carcasses; (the ship) Naglfar is loosed. Surt from the South comes with flickering flame; shines from his sword the Val-god's sun. The stony hills are dashed together, the giantesses totter; men tread the path of Hel, and heaven is cloven. The sun darkens, earth in ocean sinks, fall from heaven the bright stars, fire's breath assails the all-nourishing tree, towering fire plays against heaven itself."<sup>2</sup>

The gods perish, devoured one by one by the monsters; and the celestial legend, sad and grand now like the life of man, bears witness to the hearts of warriors and heroes.

There is no fear of pain, no care for life; they count it as dross when the idea has seized upon them. The

<sup>1</sup> Hel, the goddess of death, born of Loki and Angrboda. —Tz.

<sup>2</sup> Thorpe, *The Edda of Samund, The Vala's Prophecy*, str. 48-56, p. 9 *et passim*.

trembling of the nerves, the repugnance of animal instinct which starts back before wounds and death, are all lost in an irresistible determination. See how in their epic<sup>1</sup> the sublime springs up amid the horrible, like a bright purple flower amid a pool of blood. Sigurd has plunged his sword into the dragon Fafnir, and at that very moment they looked on one another; and Fafnir asks, as he dies, "Who art thou? and who is thy father? and what thy kin, that thou wert so hardy as to bear weapons against me?" "A hardy heart urged me on thereto, and a strong hand and this sharp sword. . . . Seldom hath hardy eld a faint-heart youth." After this triumphant eagle's cry Sigurd cuts out the worm's heart; but Regin, brother of Fafnir, drinks blood from the wound, and falls asleep. Sigurd, who was roasting the heart, raises his finger thoughtlessly to his lips. Forthwith he understands the language of the birds. The eagles scream above him in the branches. They warn him to mistrust Regin. Sigurd cuts off the latter's head, eats of Fafnir's heart, drinks his blood and his brother's. Amongst all these murders their courage and poetry grow. Sigurd has subdued Brynhild, the untamed maiden, by passing through the flaming fire; they share one couch for three nights, his naked sword betwixt them. "Nor the damsel did he kiss, nor did the Hunnish king to his arm lift her. He the blooming maid to Giuki's son delivered," because, according to his oath, he must send her to her betrothed Gunnar. She, setting her love upon

<sup>1</sup> *Fafnismál Edda*. This epic is common to the Northern races, as is the *Iliad* to the Greek populations, and is found almost entire in Germany in the *Nibelungen Lied*. The translator has also used Magnusson and Morris' poetical version of the *Völsunga Saga*, and certain songs of the *Elfr Edda*, London, 1870.

him, "Alone she sat without, at eve of day, began aloud with herself to speak: 'Sigurd must be mine; I must die, or that blooming youth clasp in my arms.'" But seeing him married, she brings about his death. "Laughed then Brynhild, Budli's daughter, once only, from her whole soul, when in her bed she listened to the loud lament of Giuki's daughter." She put on her golden corslet, pierced herself with the sword's point, and as a last request said:

"Let in the plain be raised a pile so spacious, that for us all like room may be; let them burn the Hun (Sigurd) on the one side of me, on the other side my household slaves, with collars splendid, two at our heads, and two hawks; let also lie between us both the keen-edged sword, as when we both one couch ascended; also five female thralls, eight male slaves of gentle birth fostered with me."<sup>1</sup>

All were burnt together; yet Gudrun the widow continued motionless by the corpse, and could not weep. The wives of the jarls came to console her, and each of them told her own sorrows, all the calamities of great devastations and the old life of barbarism.

"Then spoke Giaflang, Giuki's sister: 'Lo, up on earth I live most loveless, who of five mates must see the ending, of daughters twain and three sisters, of brethren eight, and abide behind lonely.' Then spake Herborg, Queen of Hunland: 'Crueller tale have I to tell of my seven sons, down in the Southlands, and the eight man, my mate, felled in the death-mead. Father and mother, and four brothers on the wide sea the winds and death played with; the billows beat on the bulwark boards. Alone must I sing o'er them, alone must I array them, alone must my hands deal with their departing; and all this was in

<sup>1</sup> Thorpe, *The Edda of Samund, Third lay of Sigurd Fafnirslide*, str. 62-64, p. 83.

one season's wearing, and none was left for love or solace. Then was I bound a prey of the battle when that same season wore to its ending ; as a tiring may must I bind the shoon of the duke's high dame, every day at dawning. From her jealous hate gat I heavy mocking, cruel lashes she laid upon me."<sup>1</sup>

All was in vain ; no word could draw tears from those dry eyes. They were obliged to lay the bloody corpse before her, ere her tears would come. Then tears flowed through the pillow ; as "the geese withal that were in the home-field, the fair fowls the may owned, fell a-screaming." She would have died, like Sigrun, on the corpse of him whom alone she had loved, if they had not deprived her of memory by a magic potion. Thus affected, she departs in order to marry Atli, king of the Huns ; and yet she goes against her will, with gloomy forebodings : for murder begets murder ; and her brothers, the murderers of Sigurd, having been drawn to Atli's court, fall in their turn into a snare like that which they had themselves laid. Then Gunnar was bound, and they tried to make him deliver up the treasure. He answers with a barbarian's laugh :

" 'Högni's heart in my hand shall lie, cut bloody from the breast of the valiant chief, the king's son, with a dull-edged knifa.' They the heart cut out from Hialli's breast ; on a dish, bleeding, laid it, and it to Gunnar bare. Then said Gunnar, lord of men : ' Here have I the heart of the timid Hialli, unlike the heart of the bold Högni ; for much it trembles as in the dish it lies ; it trembled more by half while in his breast it lay.' Högni laughed when to his heart they cut the living crest-crasher ; no lament uttered he. All bleeding on a dish they laid it, and it to Gunnar bare. Calmly said Gunnar, the warrior

<sup>1</sup> Magnusson and Morris, *Story of the Volungs and Nibelungs, Lamentation of Gudrun*, p. 118 *et passim*.

Niflung : ' Here have I the heart of the bold Högni, unlike the heart of the timid Hialli ; for it little trembles as in the dish it lies : it trembled less while in his breast it lay. So far shalt thou, Atli ! be from the eyes of men as thou wilt from the treasures be. In my power alone is all the hidden Niflung's gold, now that Högni lives not. Ever was I wavering while we both lived ; now am I so no longer, as I alone survive.'"<sup>1</sup>

It was the last insult of the self-confident man, who values neither his own life nor that of another, so that he can satiate his vengeance. They cast him into the serpent's den, and there he died, striking his harp with his foot. But the inextinguishable flame of vengeance passed from his heart to that of his sister. Corpse after corpse fall on each other ; a mighty fury hurls them open-eyed to death. She killed the children she had by Atli, and one day on his return from the carnage, gave him their hearts to eat, served in honey, and laughed coldly as she told him on what he had fed. " Uproar was on the benches, portentous the cry of men, noise beneath the costly hangings. The children of the Huns wept ; all wept save Gudrun, who never wept or for her bear-fierce brothers, or for her dear sons, young, simple."<sup>2</sup> Judge from this heap of ruin and carnage to what excess the will is strung. There were men amongst them, Berserkirs,<sup>3</sup> who in battle seized with a sort of madness, showed a sudden and super-human strength, and ceased to feel their wounds. This is the conception of a hero as engendered by this race in its infancy. Is it not strange to see them place

<sup>1</sup> Thorpe, *The Edda of Saemund, Lay of Atli*, str. 21-27, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* str. 38, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> This word signifies men who fought without a breastplate, perhaps in shirts only ; *Scottice*, " *Barecarks*."—*Tr.*

their happiness in battle, their beauty in death? Is there any people, Hindoo, Persian, Greek, or Gallic, which has formed so tragic a conception of life? Is there any which has peopled its infantine mind with such gloomy dreams? Is there any which has so entirely banished from its dreams the sweetness of enjoyment, and the softness of pleasure? Endeavours, tenacious and mournful endeavours, an ecstasy of endeavours—such was their chosen condition. Carlyle said well, that in the sombre obstinacy of an English labourer still survives the tacit rage of the Scandinavian warrior. Strife for strife's sake—such is their pleasure. With what sadness, madness, destruction, such a disposition breaks its bonds, we shall see in Shakspeare and Byron; with what vigour and purpose it can limit and employ itself when possessed by moral ideas, we shall see in the case of the Puritans.

#### IV.

They have established themselves in England; and however disordered the society which binds them together, it is founded, as in Germany, on generous sentiment. War is at every door, I am aware, but warlike virtues are within every house; courage chiefly, then fidelity. Under the brute there is a free man, and a man of spirit. There is no man amongst them who, at his own risk,<sup>1</sup> will not make alliance, go forth to fight, undertake adventures. There is no group of free men amongst them, who, in their Witenagemote, is not for ever concluding alliances one with another. Every clan, in its own district, forms a league of which

<sup>1</sup> See the *Life of Sweyn*, of *Hereward*, etc., even up to the time of the Conquest.

all the members, "brothers of the sword," defend each other, and demand revenge for the spilling of blood, at the price of their own. Every chief in his hall reckons that he has friends, not mercenaries, in the faithful ones who drink his beer, and who, having received as marks of his esteem and confidence, bracelets, swords, and suits of armour, will cast themselves between him and danger on the day of battle.<sup>1</sup> Independence and boldness rage amongst this young nation with violence and excess; but these are of themselves noble things; and no less noble are the sentiments which serve them for discipline,—to wit, an affectionate devotion, and respect for plighted faith. These appear in their laws, and break forth in their poetry. Amongst them greatness of heart gives matter for imagination. Their characters are not selfish and shifty, like those of Homer. They are brave hearts, simple and strong, faithful to their relatives, to their master in arms, firm and steadfast to enemies and friends, abounding in courage, and ready for sacrifice. "Old as I am," says one, "I will not budge hence. I mean to die by my lord's side, near this man I have loved so much. He kept his word, the word he had given to his chief, to the distributor of gifts, promising him that they should return to the town, safe and sound to their homes, or that they would fall both together, in the thick of the carnage, covered with wounds. He lies by his master's side, like a faithful servant." Though awkward in speech, their old poets find touching words when they have to paint these manly friendships. We cannot without emotion hear them relate how the old "king embraced the best of his thanes, and put his arms about his neck, how the tears flowed down the cheeks of the

<sup>1</sup> *Beowulf, passim, Death of Byrhtnoth.*

greyhaired chief. . . . The valiant man was so dear to him. He could not stop the flood which mounted from his breast. In his heart, deep in the chords of his soul, he sighed in secret after the beloved man." Few as are the songs which remain to us, they return to this subject again and again. The wanderer in a reverie dreams about his lord :<sup>1</sup> It seems to him in his spirit as if he kisses and embraces him, and lays head and hands upon his knees, as oft before in the olden time, when he rejoiced in his gifts. Then he wakes—a man without friends. He sees before him the desert tracks, the seabirds dipping in the waves, stretching wide their wings, the frost and the snow, mingled with falling hail. Then his heart's wounds press more heavily. The exile says :—

"In blithe habits full oft we, too, agreed that nought else should divide us except death alone ; at length this is changed, and as if it had never been is now our friendship. To endure enmities man orders me to dwell in the bowers of the forest, under the oak tree in this earthy cave. Cold is this earth-dwelling : I am quite wearied out. Dim are the dells, high up are the mountains, a bitter city of twigs, with briars overgrown, a joyless abode. . . . My friends are in the earth ; those loved in life, the tomb holds them. The grave is guarding, while I above alone am going. Under the oak-tree, beyond this earth-cave, there I must sit the long summer-day."

Amid their perilous mode of life, and the perpetual appeal to arms, there exists no sentiment more warm than friendship, nor any virtue stronger than loyalty.

Thus supported by powerful affection and trysted word, society is kept wholesome. Marriage is like the

<sup>1</sup> *The Wanderer, the Exile's Song, Codex Bezae Cantabrigie, published by Thorpe.*



state. We find women associating with the men, at their feasts, sober and respected.<sup>1</sup> She speaks, and they listen to her; no need for concealing or enslaving her, in order to restrain or retain her. She is a person, and not a thing. The law demands her consent to marriage, surrounds her with guarantees, accords her protection. She can inherit, possess, bequeath, appear in courts of justice, in county assemblies, in the great congress of the elders. Frequently the name of the queen and of several other ladies is inscribed in the proceedings of the Witenagemote. Law and tradition maintain her integrity, as if she were a man, and side by side with men. Her affections captivate her, as if she were a man, and side by side with men. In Alfred<sup>2</sup> there is a portrait of the wife, which for purity and elevation equals all that we can devise with our modern refinements. "Thy wife now lives for thee—for thee alone. She has enough of all kind of wealth for this present life, but she scorns them all for thy sake alone. She has forsaken them all, because she had not thee with them. Thy absence makes her think that all she possesses is nought. Thus, for love of thee, she is wasted away, and lies near death for tears and grief." Already, in the legends of the *Edda*, we have seen the maiden Sigrun at the tomb of Helgi, "as glad as the voracious hawks of Odin, when they of slaughter know, of warm prey," desiring to sleep still in the arms of death, and die at last on his grave. Nothing here like the love we find in the primitive poetry of France, Provence, Spain, and Greece. There is an absence of gaiety, of delight;

<sup>1</sup> Turner, *Hist. Angl. Sax.* iii. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred borrows his portrait from Boethius, but almost entirely rewrites it.

outside of marriage it is only a ferocious appetite, an outbreak of the instinct of the beast. It appears nowhere with its charm and its smile; there is no love song in this ancient poetry. The reason is, that with them love is not an amusement and a pleasure, but a promise and a devotion. All is grave, even sombre, in civil relations as well as in conjugal society. As in Germany, amid the sadness of a melancholic temperament and the savagery of a barbarous life, the most tragic human faculties, the deep power of love and the grand power of will, are the only ones that sway and act.

This is why the hero, as in Germany, is truly heroic. Let us speak of him at length; we possess one of their poems, that of Beowulf, almost entire. Here are the stories, which the Thanes, seated on their stools, by the light of their torches, listened to as they drank the ale of their king: we can glean thence their manners and sentiments, as in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* those of the Greeks. Beowulf is a hero, a knight-errant before the days of chivalry, as the leaders of the German bands were feudal chiefs before the institution of feudalism.<sup>1</sup> He has "rowed upon the sea, his naked sword hard in his hand, amidst the fierce waves and coldest of storms, and the rage of winter hurtled over the waves of the deep." The sea-monsters, "the many coloured foes, drew him to the bottom of the sea, and held him fast in their gripe." But he reached "the wretches with his point and with his war-bill." "The mighty sea-beast received the war-rush through his hands," and he slew nine Nicors

<sup>1</sup> Kemble thinks that the origin of this poem is very ancient, perhaps contemporary with the invasion of the Angles and Saxons, but that the version we possess is later than the seventh century.—Kemble's *Beowulf*, text and translation, 1833. The characters are Danish.

(sea-monsters). And now behold him, as he comes across the waves to succour the old King Hrothgar, who with his vassals sits afflicted in his great mead-hall, high and curved with pinnacles. For "a grim stranger, Grendel, a mighty haunter of the marshes," had entered his hall during the night, seized thirty of the thanes who were asleep, and returned in his war-craft with their carcases; for twelve years the dreadful ogre, the beastly and greedy creature, father of Orks and Jötuns, devoured men and emptied the best of houses. Beowulf, the great warrior, offers to grapple with the fiend, and foe to foe contend for life, without the bearing of either sword or ample shield, for he has "learned also that the wretch for his cursed hide recketh not of weapons," asking only that if death takes him, they will bear forth his bloody corpse and bury it; mark his fen-dwelling, and send to Hygelác, his chief, the best of war-shrouds that guards his breast.

He is lying in the hall, "trusting in his proud strength; and when the mists of night arose, lo, Grendel comes, tears open the door," seized a sleeping warrior: "he tore him unawares, he bit his body, he drank the blood from the veins, he swallowed him with continual tearings." But Beowulf seized him in turn, and "raised himself upon his elbow."

"The lordly hall thundered, the ale was spilled . . . both were enraged; savage and strong warders; the house resounded; then was it a great wonder that the wine-hall withstood the beasts of war, that it fell not upon the earth, the fair palace; but it was thus fast. . . . The noise arose, new enough; a fearful terror fell on the North Danes, on each of those who from the wall heard the outcry, God's denier sing his dreadful

lay, his song of defeat, lament his wound.<sup>1</sup> . . . The foul wretch awaited the mortal wound ; a mighty gash was evident upon his shoulder ; the sinews sprung asunder, the junctures of the bones burst ; success in war was given to Beowulf. Thence must Grendel fly sick unto death, among the refuges of the fens, to seek his joyless dwelling. He all the better knew that the end of his life, the number of his days was gone by.”<sup>2</sup>

For he had left on the ground, “hand, arm, and shoulder ;” and “in the lake of Nicors, where he was driven, the rough wave was boiling with blood, the foul spring of waves all mingled, hot with poison ; the dye, discoloured with death, bubbled with warlike gore.” There remained a female monster, his mother, who like him “was doomed to inhabit the terror of waters, the cold streams,” who came by night, and amidst drawn swords tore and devoured another man, *Æschere*, the king’s best friend. A lamentation arose in the palace, and Beowulf offered himself again. They went to the den, a hidden land, the refuge of the wolf, near the windy promontories, where a mountain stream rusheth downwards under the darkness of the hills, a flood beneath the earth ; the wood fast by its roots overshadoweth the water ; there may one by night behold a marvel, fire upon the flood : the stepper over the heath, when wearied out by the hounds, sooner will give up his soul, his life upon the brink, than plunge therein to hide his head. Strange dragons and serpents swam there ; “from time to time the horn sang a dirge, a terrible song.” Beowulf plunged into the wave, descended, passed monsters who tore his coat of mail, to the ogress, the hateful manslayer, who, seizing him in her grasp, bore him off to her dwelling. A pale gleam

<sup>1</sup> *Kemble's Beowulf*, xi. p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xii. p. 34.

shone brightly, and there, face to face, the good champion perceived

“ the she-wolf of the abyss, the mighty sea-woman ; he gave the war-onset with his battle-bill ; he held not back the swing of the sword, so that on her head the ring-mail sang aloud a greedy war-song. . . . The beam of war would not bite. Then caught the prince of the War-Geats Grendel's mother by the shoulder . . . twisted the homicide, so that she bent upon the floor. . . . She drew her knife broad, brown-edged (and tried to pierce), the twisted breast-net which protected his life. . . . Then saw he among the weapons a bill fortunate in victory, an old gigantic sword, doughty of edge, ready for use, the work of giants. He seized the belted hilt ; the warrior of the Scyldinga, fierce and savage whirled the ring-mail ; despairing of life, he struck furiously, so that it grappled hard with her about her neck ; it broke the bone-rings, the bill passed through all the doomed body ; she sank upon the floor ; the sword was bloody, the man rejoiced in his deed ; the beam shone, light stood within, even as from heaven mildly shines the lamp of the firmament.”<sup>1</sup>

Then he saw Grendel dead in a corner of the hall ; and four of his companions, having with difficulty raised the monstrous head, bore it by the hair to the palace of the king.

That was his first labour ; and the rest of his life was similar. When he had reigned fifty years on earth, a dragon, who had been robbed of his treasure, came from the hill and burned men and houses “ with waves of fire.” “ Then did the refuge of earls command to make for him a variegated shield, all of iron : he knew well enough that a shield of wood could not help him, lindenwood opposed to fire. . . . The prince

<sup>1</sup> *Beowulf*, xxii. xxiii. p. 62 *et* *passim*.

of rings was then too proud to seek the wide flier with a troop, with a large company; he feared not for himself that battle, nor did he make any account of the dragon's war, his laboriousness and valour." And yet he was sad, and went unwillingly, for he was "fated to abide the end." Then "he was ware of a cavern, a mound under the earth, nigh to the sea wave, the clashing of waters, which cave was full within of embossed ornaments and wires. . . . Then the king, hard in war sat upon the promontory, whilst he, the prince of the Geats, bade farewell to his household comrades. . . . I, the old guardian of my people, seek a feud." He "let words proceed from his breast," the dragon came, vomiting fire; the blade bit not his body, and the king "suffered painfully, involved in fire." His comrades had "turned to the wood, to save their lives," all save Wiglaf, who "went through the fatal smoke," knowing well "that it was not the old custom" to abandon relation and prince, "that he alone . . . shall suffer distress, shall sink in battle." "The worm came furious, the foul insidious stranger, variegated with waves of fire, . . . hot and warlike fierce, he clutched the whole neck with bitter banes; he was bloodied with life-gore, the blood boiled in waves."<sup>1</sup> They, with their swords, carved the worm in the midst. Yet the wound of the king became burning and swelled; "he soon discovered that poison boiled in his breast within, and sat by the wall upon a stone"; "he looked upon the work of giants, how the eternal cavern held within stone arches fast upon pillars." Then he said—

"I have held this people fifty years; there was not any king of my neighbours, who dared to greet me with warriors, to oppress

<sup>1</sup> *Beowulf*, xxxiii.-xxxvi. p. 94 *et passim*.

me with terror. . . . I held mine own well, I sought not treacherous malice, nor swore unjustly many oaths ; on account of all this, I, sick with mortal wounds, may have joy. . . . Now do thou go immediately to behold the hoard under the hoary stone, my dear Wiglaf. . . . Now, I have purchased with my death a hoard of treasures ; it will be yet of advantage at the need of the people. . . . I give thanks . . . that I might before my dying day obtain such for my peoples . . . longer may I not here be.”<sup>1</sup>

This is thorough and real generosity, not exaggerated and pretended, as it will be later on in the romantic imaginations of babbling clerics, mere composers of adventure. Fiction as yet is not far removed from fact: the man breathes manifest beneath the hero. Rude as the poetry is, its hero is grand ; he is so, simply by his deeds. Faithful, first to his prince, then to his people, he went alone, in a strange land, to venture himself for the delivery of his fellow-men ; he forgets himself in death, while thinking only that it profits others. “ Each one of us,” he says in one place, “ must abide the end of his present life.” Let, therefore, each do justice, if he can, before his death. Compare with him the monsters whom he destroys, the last traditions of the ancient wars against inferior races, and of the primitive religion ; think of his life of danger, nights upon the waves, man grappling with the brute creation ; man’s indomitable will crushing the breasts of beasts ; man’s powerful muscles which, when exerted, tear the flesh of the monsters : you will see reappear through the mist of legends, and under the light of poetry, the valiant men who, amid the madness of war and the raging of their own mood, began to settle a people and to found a state.

<sup>1</sup> *Beowulf*, xxxvii. xxxviii. p. 110 *et passim*. I have throughout always used the very words of Kemble’s translation.—Tz.

## V.

One poem nearly whole and two or three fragments are all that remain of this lay-poetry of England. The rest of the pagan current, German and barbarian, was arrested or overwhelmed, first by the influx of the Christian religion, then by the conquest of the Norman-French. But what remains more than suffices to show the strange and powerful poetic genius of the race, and to exhibit beforehand the flower in the bud.

If there has ever been anywhere a deep and serious poetic sentiment, it is here. They do not speak, they sing, or rather they shout. Each little verse is an acclamation, which breaks forth like a growl; their strong breasts heave with a groan of anger or enthusiasm, and a vehement or indistinct phrase or expression rises suddenly, almost in spite of them, to their lips. There is no art, no natural talent, for describing singly and in order the different parts of an object or an event. The fifty rays of light which every phenomenon emits in succession to a regular and well-directed intellect, come to them at once in a glowing and confused mass, disabling them by their force and convergence. Listen to their genuine war-chants, unchecked and violent, as became their terrible voices. To this day, at this distance of time, separated as they are by manners, speech, ten centuries, we seem to hear them still :—

“ The army goes forth : the birds sing, the cricket chirps, the war-weapons sound, the lance clangs against the shield. Now shineth the moon, wandering under the sky. Now arise deeds of woe, which the enmity of this people prepares to do. . . . Then in the court came the tumult of war-carnage. They seized with their hands the hollow wood of the shield. They smote through the bones of the head. The roofs of the castle resounded,



until Garulf fell in battle, the first of earth-dwelling men, son of Guthlaf. Around him lay many brave men dying. The raven whirled about, dark and sombre, like a willow leaf. There was a sparkling of blades, as if all Finsburg were on fire. Never have I heard of a more worthy battle in war."<sup>1</sup>

This is the song on Athelstan's victory at Brunanburh:

"Here Athelstan king, of earls the lord, the giver of the bracelets of the nobles, and his brother also, Edmund the ætheling, the Elder a lasting glory won by slaughter in battle, with the edges of swords, at Brunanburh. The wall of shields they cleaved, they hewed the noble banners: with the rest of the family, the children of Edward. . . . Pursuing, they destroyed the Scottish people and the ship-fleet. . . . The field was coloured with the warrior's blood! After that the sun on high, . . . the greatest star! glided over the earth, God's candle bright! till the noble creature hastened to her setting. There lay soldiers many with darts struck down, Northern men over their shields shot. So were the Scots; weary of ruddy battle. . . . The screamers of war they left behind; the raven to enjoy, the dismal kite, and the black raven with horned beak, and the hoarse toad; the eagle, afterwards to feast on the white flesh; the greedy battle-hawk, and the grey beast, the wolf in the wood."<sup>2</sup>

Here all is imagery. In their impassioned minds events are not bald, with the dry propriety of an exact description; each fits in with its pomp of sound, shape, colouring; it is almost a vision which is raised, complete, with its accompanying emotions, joy, fury, excitement. In their speech, arrows are "the serpents of Hel, shot from bows of horn;" ships are "great sea-

<sup>1</sup> Conybeare's *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 1826, *Battle of Finsborough*, p. 175. The complete collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry has been published by M. Grein.

<sup>2</sup> Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii., book 9, ch. i. p. 245.

steeds," the sea is "a chalice of waves," the helmet is "the castle of the head:" they need an extraordinary speech to express their vehement sensations, so that after a time, in Iceland, where this kind of poetry was carried on to excess, the earlier inspiration failed, art replaced nature, the Skalds were reduced to a distorted and obscure jargon. But whatever be the imagery, here as in Iceland, though unique, it is too feeble. The poets have not satisfied their inner emotion if it is only expressed by a single word. Time after time they return to and repeat their idea. "The sun on high, the great star, God's brilliant candle, the noble creature!" Four times successively they employ the same thought, and each time under a new aspect. All its different aspects rise simultaneously before the barbarian's eyes, and each word was like a fit of the semihallucination which possessed him. Verily, in such a condition, the regularity of speech and of ideas is disturbed at every turn. The succession of thought in the visionary is not the same as in a reasoning mind. One colour induces another; from sound he passes to sound; his imagination is like a diorama of unexplained pictures. His phrases recur and change: he emits the word that comes to his lips without hesitation; he leaps over wide intervals from idea to idea. The more his mind is transported, the quicker and wider the intervals traversed. With one spring he visits the poles of his horizon, and touches in one moment objects which seemed to have the world between them. His ideas are entangled without order; without notice, abruptly, the poet will return to the idea he has quitted, and insert it in the thought to which he is giving expression. It is impossible to translate these incongruous ideas, which quite disconcert our modern style.

At times they are unintelligible.<sup>1</sup> Articles, particles, everything capable of illuminating thought, of marking the connection of terms, of producing regularity of ideas, all rational and logical artifices, are neglected.<sup>2</sup> Passion bellows forth like a great shapeless beast; and that is all. It rises and starts in little abrupt lines; it is the acme of barbarism. Homer's happy poetry is copiously developed, in full narrative, with rich and extended imagery. All the details of a complete picture are not too much for him; he loves to look at things, he lingers over them, rejoices in their beauty, dresses them in splendid words; he is like the Greek girls, who thought themselves ugly if they did not bedeck arms and shoulders with all the gold coins from their purse, and all the treasures from their caskets; his long verses flow by with their cadences, and spread out like a purple robe under an Ionian sun. Here the clumsy-fingered poet crowds and clashes his ideas in a narrow measure; if measure there be, he barely observes it; all his ornament is three words beginning with the same letter. His chief care is to abridge, to imprison thought in a kind of mutilated cry.<sup>3</sup> The force of the internal impression, which, not knowing how to unfold itself, becomes condensed and doubled by accumulation; the harshness of the outward expression, which, subservient

<sup>1</sup> The cleverest Anglo-Saxon scholars, Turner, Conybeare, Thorpe recognise this difficulty.

<sup>2</sup> Turner, iii. 231, *et passim*. The translations in French, however literal, do injustice to the text; that language is too clear, too logical. No Frenchman can understand this extraordinary phase of intellect, except by taking a dictionary, and deciphering some pages of Anglo-Saxon for a fortnight.

<sup>3</sup> Turner remarks that the same idea expressed by King Alfred, in prose and then in verse, takes in the first case seven words, in the second five.—*History of the Anglo-Saxons*, iii. 235.

to the energy and shocks of the inner sentiment, seeks only to exhibit it intact and original, in spite of and at the expense of all order and beauty,—such are the characteristics of their poetry, and these also will be the characteristics of the poetry which is to follow.

## VI.

A race so constituted was predisposed to Christianity, by its gloom, its aversion to sensual and reckless living, its inclination for the serious and sublime. When their sedentary habits had reconciled their souls to a long period of ease, and weakened the fury which fed their sanguinary religion, they readily inclined to a new faith. The vague adoration of the great powers of nature, which eternally fight for mutual destruction, and, when destroyed, rise up again to the combat, had long since disappeared in the dim distance. Society, on its formation, introduced the idea of peace and the need for justice, and the war-gods faded from the minds of men, with the passions which had created them. A century and a half after the invasion by the Saxons,<sup>1</sup> Roman missionaries, bearing a silver cross with a picture of Christ, came in procession chanting a litany. Presently the high priest of the Northumbrians declared in presence of the nobles that the old gods were powerless, and confessed that formerly “he knew nothing of that which he adored;” and he among the first, lance in hand, assisted to demolish their temple. Then a chief rose in the assembly, and said :

“ You remember, it may be, O king, that which sometimes happens in winter when you are seated at table with your earls and thanes. Your fire is lighted, and your hall warmed, and

<sup>1</sup> 596-626. *Ang. Thierry*, i. 81 ; *Bede*, xii. 2.

without is rain and snow and storm. Then comes a swallow flying across the hall ; he enters by one door, and leaves by another. The brief moment while he is within is pleasant to him ; he feels not rain nor cheerless winter weather ; but the moment is brief—the bird flies away in the twinkling of an eye, and he passes from winter to winter. Such, methinks, is the life of man on earth, compared with the uncertain time beyond. It appears for a while ; but what is the time which comes after—the time which was before ? We know not. If, then, this new doctrine may teach us somewhat of greater certainty, it were well that we should regard it.”

This restlessness, this feeling of the infinite and dark beyond, this sober, melancholy eloquence, were the harbingers of spiritual life.<sup>1</sup> We find nothing like it amongst the nations of the south, naturally pagan, and preoccupied with the present life. These utter barbarians embrace Christianity straightway, through sheer force of mood and clime. To no purpose are they brutal, heavy, shackled by infantine superstitions, capable, like King Canute, of buying for a hundred golden talents the arm of Augustine. They possess the idea of God. This grand God of the Bible, omnipotent and unique, who disappears almost entirely in the middle ages,<sup>2</sup> obscured by His court and His family, endures amongst them in spite of absurd or grotesque legends. They do not blot Him out under pious romances, by the elevation of the saints, or under feminine caresses, to benefit the infant Jesus and the Virgin. Their grandeur and their severity raise them to His high level ; they are not tempted, like artistic and talkative nations, to replace religion by a fair and agreeable narrative. More than any race in Europe, they approach, by the

<sup>1</sup> Jouffroy, *Problem of Human Destiny*.

<sup>2</sup> Michelet, preface to *La Renaissance* ; Didron, *Histoire de Dieu*.

simplicity and energy of their conceptions, the old Hebraic spirit. Enthusiasm is their natural condition; and their new Deity fills them with admiration, as their ancient deities inspired them with fury. They have hymns, genuine odes, which are but a concrete of exclamations. They have no development; they are incapable of restraining or explaining their passion; it bursts forth, in raptures, at the vision of the Almighty. The heart alone speaks here—a strong, barbarous heart. Cædmon, their old poet,<sup>1</sup> says Bede, was a more ignorant man than the others, who knew no poetry; so that in the hall, when they handed him the harp, he was obliged to withdraw, being unable to sing like his companions. Once, keeping night-watch over the stable, he fell asleep. A stranger appeared to him, and asked him to sing something, and these words came into his head: “Now we ought to praise the Lord of heaven, the power of the Creator, and His skill, the deeds of the Father of glory; how He, being eternal God, is the author of all marvels; who, almighty guardian of the human race, created first for the sons of men the heavens as the roof of their dwelling, and then the earth.” Remembering this when he woke,<sup>2</sup> he came to the town, and they brought him before the learned men, before the abbess Hilda, who, when they had heard him, thought that he had received a gift from heaven, and made him a monk in the abbey. There he spent his life listening to portions of Holy Writ, which were explained to him in Saxon, “ruminating over them like a pure animal, turned them into most sweet verse.” Thus is true poetry born. These men pray with all the emotion of a new soul; they kneel; they adore; the less they know the more they

<sup>1</sup> About 630. See *Codex Bezae Cantabrigie*, Thorpe.

<sup>2</sup> Bede, iv. 24.

think. Some one has said that the first and most sincere hymn is this one word O! Theirs were hardly longer; they only repeated time after time some deep passionate word, with monotonous vehemence. "In heaven art Thou, our aid and succour, resplendent with happiness! All things bow before thee, before the glory of Thy Spirit. With one voice they call upon Christ; they all cry: Holy, holy art thou, King of the angels of heaven, our Lord! and Thy judgments are just and great: they reign for ever and in all places, in the multitude of Thy works." We are reminded of the songs of the servants of Odin, tonsured now, and clad in the garments of monks. Their poetry is the same; they think of God, as of Odin, in a string of short, accumulated, passionate images, like a succession of lightning-flashes; the Christian hymns are a sequel to the pagan. One of them, Adhelm, stood on a bridge leading to the town where he lived, and repeated warlike and profane odes as well as religious poetry, in order to attract and instruct the men of his time. He could do it without changing his key. In one of them, a funeral song, Death speaks. It was one of the last Saxon compositions, containing a terrible Christianity, which seems at the same time to have sprung from the blackest depths of the Edda. The brief metre sounds abruptly, with measured stroke, like the passing bell. It is as if we hear the dull resounding responses which roll through the church, while the rain beats on the dim glass, and the broken clouds sail mournfully in the sky; and our eyes, glued to the pale face of a dead man, feel beforehand the horror of the damp grave into which the living are about to cast him.

"For thee was a house built ere thou wert born; for thee

was a mould shapen ere thou of thy mother camest. Its height is not determined, nor its depth measured ; nor is it closed up (however long it may be) until I thee bring where thou shalt remain ; until I shall measure thee and the sod of the earth. Thy house is not highly built ; it is unhigh and low. When thou art in it, the heel-ways are low, the side-ways unhigh. The roof is built thy breast full nigh ; so thou shalt in earth dwell full cold, dim, and dark. Doorless is that house, and dark it is within. There thou art fast detained, and Death holds the key. Loathly is that earth-house, and grim to dwell in. There thou shalt dwell, and worms shall share thee. Thus thou art laid, and leavest thy friends. Thou hast no friend that will come to thee, who will ever inquire how that house liketh thee, who shall ever open for thee the door, and seek thee, for soon thou becomest loathly and hateful to look upon."<sup>1</sup>

Has Jeremy Taylor a more gloomy picture ? The two religious poetries, Christian and pagan, are so like, that one might mingle their incongruities, images, and legends. In *Beowulf*, altogether pagan, the Deity appears as Odin, more mighty and serene, and differs from the other only as a peaceful *Bretwalda*<sup>2</sup> differs from an adventurous and heroic bandit-chief. The Scandinavian monsters, *Jötuns*, enemies of the *Æsir*,<sup>3</sup> have not vanished ; but they descend from Cain, and the giants drowned by the flood.<sup>4</sup> Their new hell is nearly the ancient *Nástrand*,<sup>5</sup> " a dwelling deadly cold, full of bloody eagles and pale adders ;" and the dreadful last day of judg-

<sup>1</sup> Conybeare's *Illustrations*, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> *Bretwalda* was a species of war-king, or temporary and elective chief of all the Saxons.—*Tr.*

<sup>3</sup> The *Æsir* (sing. *As*) are the gods of the Scandinavian nations, of whom Odin was the chief.—*Tr.*

<sup>4</sup> Kemble, i. i. xii. In this chapter he has collected many features which show the endurance of the ancient mythology.

<sup>5</sup> *Nástrand* is the strand or shore of the dead.—*Tr.*



ment, when all will crumble into dust, and make way for a purer world, resembles the final destruction of *Edda*, that "twilight of the gods," which will end in a victorious regeneration, an everlasting joy "under a fairer sun."

By this natural conformity they were able to make their religious poems indeed poems. Power in spiritual productions arises only from the sincerity of personal and original sentiment. If they can relate religious tragedies, it is because their soul was tragic, and in a degree biblical. They introduce into their verses, like the old prophets of Israel, their fierce vehemence, their murderous hatreds, their fanaticism, all the shudderings of their flesh and blood. One of them, whose poem is mutilated, has related the history of Judith—with what inspiration we shall see. It needed a barbarian to display in such strong light excesses, tumult, murder, vengeance, and combat.

"Then was Holofernes exhilarated with wine ; in the halls of his guests he laughed and shouted, he roared and dinned. Then might the children of men afar off hear how the stern one stormed and clamoured, animated and elated with wine. He admonished amply that they should bear it well to those sitting on the bench. So was the wicked one over all the day, the lord and his men, drunk with wine, the stern dispenser of wealth ; till that they swimming lay over drunk, all his nobility, as they were death-slain."<sup>1</sup>

The night having arrived, he commands them to bring into his tent "the illustrious virgin ;" then, going in to visit her, he falls drunk on his bed. The moment was come for "the maid of the Creator, the holy woman."

<sup>1</sup> Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii. book 9, ch. 3, p. 271.

"She took the heathen man fast by his hair ; she drew him by his limbs towards her disgracefully ; and the mischief-odious man at her pleasure laid ; so as the wretch she might the easiest well command. She with the twisted locks struck the hateful enemy, meditating hate, with the red sword, till she had half cut off his neck ; so that he lay in a swoon, drunk and mortally wounded. He was not then dead, not entirely lifeless. She struck then earnest, the woman illustrious in strength, another time the heathen bound, till that his head rolled forth upon the floor. The foul one lay without a coffer ; backward his spirit turned under the abyss, and there was plunged below, with sulphur fastened ; for ever afterwards wounded by worms. Bound in torments, hard imprisoned, in hell he burns. After his course he need not hope, with darkness overwhelmed, that he may escape from that mansion of worms ; but there he shall remain ; ever and ever, without end, henceforth in that cavern-house, void of the joys of hope."<sup>1</sup>

Has any one ever heard a sterner accent of satisfied hate ? When Clovis listened to the Passion play, he cried, "Why was I not there with my Franks !" So here the old warrior instinct swelled into flame over the Hebrew wars. As soon as Judith returned,

"Men under helms (went out) from the holy city at the dawn itself. They dinned shields ; men roared loudly. At this rejoiced the lank wolf in the wood, and the wan raven, the fowl greedy of slaughter, both from the west, that the sons of men for them should have thought to prepare their fill on corpses. And to them flew in their paths the active devourer, the eagle, hoary in his feathers. The willowed kite, with his horned beak, sang the song of Hilda. The noble warriors proceeded, they in mail, to the battle, furnished with shields, with swelling banners. . . . They then speedily let fly forth showers of arrows, the serpents of Hilda, from their horn bows ; the spears on the

<sup>1</sup> Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii. book 9, ch. 3, p. 272.

ground hard stormed. Loud raged the plunderers of battle ; they sent their darts into the throng of the chiefs. . . . They that awhile before the reproach of the foreigners, the taunts of the heathen endured.”<sup>1</sup>

Amongst all these unknown poets<sup>2</sup> there is one whose name we know, Cædmon, perhaps the old Cædmon who wrote the first hymn ; like him, at all events, who, paraphrasing the Bible with a barbarian’s vigour and sublimity, has shown the grandeur and fury of the sentiment with which the men of these times entered into their new religion. He also sings when he speaks ; when he mentions the ark, it is with a profusion of poetic names, “the floating house, the greatest of floating chambers, the wooden fortress, the moving roof, the cavern, the great sea-chest,” and many more. Every time he thinks of it, he sees it with his mind, like a quick luminous vision, and each time under a new aspect, now undulating on the muddy waves, between two ridges of foam, now casting over the water its enormous shadow, black and high like a castle, “now enclosing in its cavernous sides” the endless swarm of caged beasts. Like the others, he wrestles with God in his heart ; triumphs like a warrior over destruction and victory ; and in relating the death of Pharaoh, can hardly speak from anger, or see, because the blood mounts to his eyes :

“The folk was affrighted, the flood-dread seized on their sad souls ; ocean wailed with death, the mountain heights were with blood besteamed, the sea foamed gore, crying was in the waves, the water full of weapons, a death-mist rose ; the Egyptians were turned back ; trembling they fled, they felt fear : would

<sup>1</sup> Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii. book 9, ch. 3, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> Grein, *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen poësie*.

that host gladly find their homes ; their vaunt grew sadder : against them, as a cloud, rose the fall rolling of the waves ; there came not any of that host to home, but from behind inclosed them fate with the wave. Where ways ere lay sea raged. Their might was merged, the streams stood, the storm rose high to heaven ; the loudest army-cry the hostile uttered ; the air above was thickened with dying voices. . . . Ocean raged, drew itself up on high, the storms rose, the corpses rolled." <sup>1</sup>

Is the song of the Exodus more abrupt, more vehement, or more savage ? These men can speak of the creation like the Bible, because they speak of destruction like the Bible. They have only to look into their own hearts, in order to discover an emotion sufficiently strong to raise their souls to the height of their Creator. This emotion existed already in their pagan legends ; and Cædmon, in order to recount the origin of things, has only to turn to the ancient dreams, such as have been preserved in the prophecies of the *Edda*.

"There had not here as yet, save cavern-shade, aught been ; but this wide abyss stood deep and dim, strange to its Lord, idle and useless ; on which looked with his eyes the King firm of mind, and beheld those places void of joys ; saw the dark cloud lower in eternal night, swart under heaven, dark and waste, until this worldly creation through the word existed of the Glory-King. . . . The earth as yet was not green with grass ; ocean cover'd, swart in eternal night, far and wide the dusky ways." <sup>2</sup>

In this manner will Milton hereafter speak, the descendant of the Hebrew seers, last of the Scandinavian seers, but assisted in the development of his thought by all the resources of Latin culture and

<sup>1</sup> Thorpe, *Cædmon*, 1832, xlvi. p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> Thorpe, *Cædmon*, ii. p. 7. A likeness exists between this song and corresponding portions of the *Edda*.





civilisation. And yet he will add nothing to the primitive sentiment. Religious instinct is not acquired ; it belongs to the blood, and is inherited with it. So it is with other instincts ; pride in the first place, indomitable self-conscious energy, which sets man in opposition to all domination, and inures him against all pain. Milton's Satan exists already in Cædmon's, as the picture exists in the sketch ; because both have their model in the race ; and Cædmon found his originals in the northern warriors, as Milton did in the Puritans :

" Why shall I for his favour serve, bend to him in such vassalage ? I may be a god as he. Stand by me, strong associates, who will not fail me in the strife. Heroes stern of mood, they have chosen me for chief, renowned warriors ! with such may one devise counsel, with such capture his adherents ; they are my zealous friends, faithful in their thoughts ; I may be their chieftain, sway in this realm ; thus to me it seemeth not right that I in aught need cringe to God for any good ; I will no longer be his vassal." <sup>1</sup>

He is overcome : shall he be subdued ? He is cast into the place " where torment they suffer, burning heat intense, in midst of hell, fire and broad flames : so also the bitter seeks smoke and darkness ; " will he repent ? At first he is astonished, he despairs ; but it is a hero's despair.

" This narrow place is most unlike that other that we are knew, <sup>2</sup> high in heaven's kingdom, which my master bestow'd on me. . . . Oh, had I power of my hands, and might one season

<sup>1</sup> Thorpe, *Cædmon*, iv. p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> This is Milton's opening also. (See *Paradise Lost*, Book i. verse 242, etc.) One would think that he must have had some knowledge of Cædmon from the translation of Junius.

be without, be one winter's space, then with this host I—But around me lie iron bonds, presseth this cord of chain : I am powerless ! me have so hard the clasps of hell, so firmly grasped ! Here is a vast fire above and underneath, never did I see a loathlier landakip ; the flame abateth not, hot over hell. Me hath the clasping of these rings, this hard-polish'd band, impeded in my course, debarr'd me from my way ; my feet are bound, my hands manacled, . . . so that with aught I cannot from these limb-bonds escape."<sup>1</sup>

As there is nothing to be done against God, it is His new creature, man, whom he must attack. To him who has lost everything, vengeance is left ; and if the conquered can enjoy this, he will find himself happy ; "he will sleep softly, even under his chains."

## VII.

Here the foreign culture ceased. Beyond Christianity it could not graft upon this barbarous stock any fruitful or living branch. All the circumstances which elsewhere mellowed the wild sap, failed here. The Saxons found Britain abandoned by the Romans ; they had not yielded, like their brothers on the Continent, to the ascendancy of a superior civilisation ; they had not become mingled with the inhabitants of the land ; they had always treated them like enemies or slaves, pursuing like wolves those who escaped to the mountains of the west, treating like beasts of burden those whom they had conquered with the land. While the Germans of Gaul, Italy, and Spain became Romans, the Saxons retained their language, their genius and manners, and created in Britain a Germany outside of Germany. A hundred and fifty years after the Saxon

<sup>1</sup> Thorpe, *Cædmon*, iv. p. 23.



invasion, the introduction of Christianity and the dawn of security attained by a society inclining to peace, gave birth to a kind of literature; and we meet with the venerable Bede, and later on, Alcuin, John Scotus Erigena, and some others, commentators, translators, teachers of barbarians, who tried not to originate but to compile, to pick out and explain from the great Greek and Latin encyclopædia something which might suit the men of their time. But the wars with the Danes came and crushed this humble plant, which, if left to itself, would have come to nothing.<sup>1</sup> When Alfred<sup>2</sup> the Deliverer became king, "there were very few ecclesiastics," he says, "on this side of the Humber, who could understand in English their own Latin prayers, or translate any Latin writing into English. On the other side of the Humber I think there were scarce any; there were so few that, in truth, I cannot remember a single man south of the Thames, when I took the kingdom, who was capable of it." He tried, like Charlemagne, to instruct his people, and turned into Saxon for their use several works, above all some moral books, as the *de Consolatione* of Boethius; but this very translation bears witness to the barbarism of his audience. He adapts the text in order to bring it down to their intelligence; the pretty verses of Boethius, somewhat pretentious, laboured, elegant, crowded with classical allusions of a refined and compact style worthy

<sup>1</sup> They themselves feel their impotence and decrepitude. Bede, dividing the history of the world into six periods, says that the fifth, which stretches from the return out of Babylon to the birth of Christ, is the senile period; the sixth is the present, *atque decrepita, totius morte secutis consummanda*.

<sup>2</sup> Died in 901; Adhelm died 709, Bede died 735, Alcuin lived under Charlemagne, Erigena under Charles the Bald (843-877).

of Seneca, become an artless, long drawn out and yet desultory prose, like a nurse's fairy tale, explaining everything, recommencing and breaking off its phrases, making ten turns about a single detail; so low was it necessary to stoop to the level of this new intelligence, which had never thought or known anything. Here follows the latin of Boethius, so affected, so pretty, with the English translation affixed:—

“Quondam funera conjugis  
 Vates Threicius gemens,  
 Postquam flebilibus modis  
 Silvas currere, mobiles  
 Amnes stare coegerat,  
 Junxitque intrepidum latus  
 Sævis cerva leonibus,  
 Nec visum timuit lepus  
 Jam cantu placidum canem;  
 Cum flagrantior intima  
 Fervor pectoris ureret,  
 Nec qui cuncta subegerant  
 Mulcerent dominum modi;  
 Immites superos querens,  
 Infernas adiit domos.  
 Illic blanda sonantibus  
 Chordis carmina temperans,  
 Quidquid præcipuis Deæ  
 Matris fontibus hauserat,  
 Quod luctus dabat impotens,  
 Quod luctum geminans amor,  
 Deflet Tartara commovens,  
 Et dulci veniam prece  
 Umbrarum dominos rogat.  
 Stupet tergeminus novo  
 Captus carmine janitor;

“It happened formerly that there was a harper in the country called Thrace, which was in Greece. The harper was inconceivably good. His name was Orpheus. He had a very excellent wife, called Eurydice. Then began men to say concerning the harper, that he could harp so that the wood moved, and the stones stirred themselves at the sound, and wild beasts would run therto, and stand as if they were tame; so still, that though men or hounds pursued them, they shunned them not. Then said they, that the harper's wife should die, and her soul should be led to hell. Then should the harper become so sorrowful that he could not remain among the men, but frequented the wood, and sat on the mountains, both day and night, weeping and harping, so that the woods shook, and the rivers stood still, and no hart shunned any lion, nor

Quæ sontes agitant metu  
 Ultrices scelerum Dææ  
 Jam mœstæ lacrymis madent.  
 Non Ixionium caput  
 Velox præcipitat rota,  
 Et longa site perditus  
 Spernit flumina Tantalus.  
 Vultur dum satur est modis  
 Non traxit Tityi jecur.  
 Tandem, vincimur, arbiter  
 Umbrarum miserans ait.  
 Donemus comitem viro,  
 Emptam carmine conjugem.  
 Sed lex dona coerceat,  
 Nec, dum Tartara liquerit,  
 Fas sit lumina flectere.  
 Quis legem det amantibus !  
 Major lex fit amor sibi.  
 Heu ! noctis prope terminos  
 Orpheus Eurydicem suam  
 Vidit, perdidit, occidit.  
 Vos hæc fabula respicit,  
 Quicumque in superum diem  
 Mentem ducere quæritis.  
 Nam qui tartareum in specus  
 Victus lumina flexerit,  
 Quidquid præcipuum trahit  
 Perdit, dum videt inferos."

*Book III. Metre 12.*

hare any hound ; nor did cattle  
 know any hatred, or any fear of  
 others, for the pleasure of the  
 sound. Then it seemed to the  
 harper that nothing in this world  
 pleased him. Then thought he  
 that he would seek the gods of  
 hell, and endeavour to allure them  
 with his harp, and pray that they  
 would give him back his wife.  
 When he came thither, then  
 should there come towards him  
 the dog of hell, whose name was  
 Cerberus,—he should have three  
 heads,—and began to wag his tail,  
 and play with him for his harping.  
 Then was there also a very hor-  
 rible gatekeeper, whose name  
 should be Charon. He had also  
 three heads, and he was very old.  
 Then began the harper to beseech  
 him that he would protect him  
 while he was there, and bring him  
 thence again safe. Then did he  
 promise that to him, because he  
 was desirous of the unaccustomed  
 sound. Then went he farther  
 until he met the fierce goddesses,  
 whom the common people call  
 Parcæ, of whom they say, that  
 they know no respect for any man, but punish every man accord-  
 ing to his deeds ; and of whom they say, that they control every  
 man's fortune. Then began he to implore their mercy. Then  
 began they to weep with him. Then went he farther, and all  
 the inhabitants of hell ran towards him, and led him to their

king : and all began to speak with him, and to pray that which he prayed. And the restless wheel which Ixion, the king of the Lapithæ, was bound to for his guilt, that stood still for his harping. And Tantalus the king, who in this world was immoderately greedy, and whom that same vice of greediness followed there, he became quiet. And the vulture should cease, so that he tore not the liver of Tityus the king, which before therewith tormented him. And all the punishments of the inhabitants of hell were suspended, whilst he harped before the king. When he long and long had harped, then spoke the king of the inhabitants of hell, and said, Let us give the man his wife, for he has earned her by his harping. He then commanded him that he should well observe *that he never looked backwards* after he departed thence ; and said, if he looked backwards, that he should lose the woman. But men can with great difficulty, if at all, restrain love ! Wellaway ! What ! Orpheus then led his wife with him till he came to the boundary of light and darkness. Then went his wife after him. When he came forth into the light, then looked he behind his back towards the woman. Then was she immediately lost to him. This fable teaches every man who desires to fly the darkness of hell, and to come to the light of the true good, that he look not about him to his old vices, so that he practise them again as fully as he did before. For whosoever with full will turns his mind to the vices which he had before forsaken, and practises them, and they then fully please him, and he never thinks of forsaking them ; then loses he all his former good unless he again amend it."<sup>1</sup>

A man speaks thus when he wishes to impress upon the mind of his hearers an idea which is not clear to them. Boethius had for his audience senators, men of culture, who understood as well as we the slightest mythological allusion. Alfred is obliged to take them

<sup>1</sup> Fox's *Alfred's Boethius*, chap. 35, § 6, 1864.

up and develop them, like a father or a master, who draws his little boy between his knees, and relates to him names, qualities, crimes and their punishments, which the Latin only hints at. But the ignorance is such that the teacher himself needs correction. He takes the *Parcæ* for the *Erinyes*, and gives Charon three heads like Cerberus. There is no adornment in his version; no delicacy as in the original. Alfred has hard work to make himself understood. What, for instance, becomes of the noble Platonic moral, the apt interpretation after the style of Iamblichus and Porphyry? It is altogether dulled. He has to call everything by its name, and turn the eyes of his people to tangible and visible things. It is a sermon suited to his audience of Thanes; the Danes whom he had converted by the sword needed a clear moral. If he had translated for them exactly the last words of Boethius, they would have opened wide their big stupid eyes and fallen asleep.

For the whole talent of an uncultivated mind lies in the force and oneness of its sensations. Beyond that it is powerless. The art of thinking and reasoning lies above it. These men lost all genius when they lost their fever-heat. They lisped awkwardly and heavily dry chronicles, a sort of historical almanacks. You might think them peasants, who, returning from their toil, came and scribbled with chalk on a smoky table the date of a year of scarcity, the price of corn, the changes in the weather, a death. Even so, side by side with the meagre Bible chronicles, which set down the successions of kings, and of Jewish massacres, are exhibited the exaltation of the psalms and the transports of prophecy. The same lyric poet can be alternately a brute and a genius, because

his genius comes and goes like a disease, and instead of having it he simply is ruled by it.

"A. D. 611. This year Cynegils succeeded to the government in Wessex, and held it one-and-thirty winters. Cynegils was the son of Ceol, Ceol of Cutha, Cutha of Cynric.

"614. This year Cynegils and Cnichelm fought at Bampton, and slew two thousand and forty-six of the Welsh.

"678. This year appeared the comet-star in August, and shone every morning during three months like a sunbeam. Bishop Wilfrid being driven from his bishopric by King Everth, two bishops were consecrated in his stead.

"901. This year died Alfred, the son of Ethelwulf, six nights before the mass of All Saints. He was king over all the English nation, except that part that was under the power of the Danes. He held the government one year and a half less than thirty winters; and then Edward his son took to the government.

"902. This year there was the great fight at the Holme, between the men of Kent and the Danes.

"1077. This year were reconciled the King of the Franks, and William, King of England. But it continued only a little while. This year was London burned, one night before the Assumption of St. Mary, so terribly as it never was before since it was built."<sup>1</sup>

It is thus the poor monks speak, with monotonous dryness, who after Alfred's time gather up and take note of great visible events; sparsely scattered we find a few moral reflections, a passionate emotion, nothing more. In the tenth century we see King Edgar give a manor to a bishop, on condition that he will put into Saxon the monastic regulation written in Latin by Saint Benedict. Alfred himself was almost the last man of culture; he, like Charlemagne, became so only by dint of deter-

<sup>1</sup> All these extracts are taken from Ingram's *Saxon Chronicle*, 1822.

mination and patience. In vain the great spirits of this age endeavour to link themselves to the relics of the fine, ancient civilisation, and to raise themselves above the chaotic and muddy ignorance in which the others flounder. They rise almost alone, and on their death the rest sink again into the mire. It is the human beast that remains master; the mind cannot find a place amidst the outbursts and the desires of the flesh, gluttony and brute force. Even in the little circle where he moves, his labour comes to nought. The model which he proposed to himself oppresses and enchains him in a cramping imitation; he aspires but to be a good copyist; he produces a gathering of centos which he calls Latin verses; he applies himself to the discovery of expressions, sanctioned by good models; he succeeds only in elaborating an emphatic, spoiled Latin, bristling with incongruities. In place of ideas, the most profound amongst them serve up the defunct doctrines of defunct authors. They compile religious manuals and philosophical manuals from the Fathers. Erigena, the most learned, goes to the extent of reproducing the old complicated dreams of Alexandrian metaphysics. How far these speculations and reminiscences soar above the barbarous crowd which howls and bustles in the depths below, no words can express. There was a certain king of Kent in the seventh century who could not write. Imagine bachelors of theology discussing before an audience of waggoners, not Parisian waggoners, but such as survive in Auvergne or in the Vosges. Among these clerks, who think like studious scholars in accordance with their favourite authors, and are doubly separated from the world as scholars and monks, Alfred alone, by his position as a layman and a practical man, descends in

his Saxon translations and his Saxon verses to the common level ; and we have seen that his effort, like that of Charlemagne, was fruitless. There was an impassable wall between the old learned literature and the present chaotic barbarism. Incapable, yet compelled, to fit into the ancient mould, they gave it a twist. Unable to reproduce ideas, they reproduced a metre. They tried to eclipse their rivals in versification by the refinement of their composition, and the prestige of a difficulty overcome. So, in our own colleges, the good scholars imitate the clever divisions and symmetry of Claudian rather than the ease and variety of Virgil. They put their feet in irons, and showed their smartness by running in shackles ; they weighted themselves with rules of modern rhyme and rules of ancient metre ; they added the necessity of beginning each verse with the same letter that began the last. A few, like Adhelm, wrote square acrostics, in which the first line, repeated at the end, was found also to the left and right of the piece. Thus made up of the first and last letters of each verse, it forms a border to the whole piece, and the morsel of verse is like a piece of tapestry. Strange literary tricks, which changed the poet into an artisan. They bear witness to the difficulties which then impeded culture and nature, and spoiled at once the Latin form and the Saxon genius.

Beyond this barrier, which drew an impassable line between civilisation and barbarism, there was another, no less impassable, between the Latin and Saxon genius. The strong German imagination, in which glowing and obscure visions suddenly meet and abruptly overflow, was in contrast with the reasoning spirit, in which ideas gather and are developed only in a regular order ; so



that if the barbarian, in his classical attempts, retained any part of his primitive instincts, he succeeded only in producing a grotesque and frightful monster. One of them this very Adhelm, a relative of King Ina, who sang on the town-bridge profane and sacred hymns alternately, too much imbued with Saxon poesy, simply to imitate the antique models, adorned his Latin prose and verse with all the "English magnificence."<sup>1</sup> You might compare him to a barbarian who seizes a flute from the skilled hands of a player of Augustus' court, in order to blow on it with inflated lungs, as if it were the bellowing horn of an aurochs. The sober speech of the Roman orators and senators becomes in his hands full of exaggerated and incoherent images; he violently connects words, uniting them in a sudden and extravagant manner; he heaps up his colours, and utters extraordinary and unintelligible nonsense, like that of the later Skalds; in short, he is a latinised Skald, dragging into his new tongue the ornaments of Scandinavian poetry, such as alliteration, by dint of which he congregates in one of his epistles fifteen consecutive words, all beginning with the same letter; and in order to make up his fifteen, he introduces a barbarous Græcism amongst the Latin words.<sup>2</sup> Amongst the others, the writers of legends, you will meet many times with deformation of Latin, distorted by the outburst of a too vivid imagination; it breaks out even in their scholastic and scientific writing. Here is part of a dialogue between Alcuin and prince Pepin, a son of Charlemagne,

<sup>1</sup> William of Malmesbury's expression.

<sup>2</sup> *Primitus* (pantorum procerum prætorumque pio potissimum paternoque præsertim privilegio) panegyricum poemataque passim prosatori sub polo promulgantes, stridula vocum symphonia ac melodis cantila, æque carmine modulaturi hymnizemus.

and he uses like formulas the little poetic and bold phrases which abound in the national poetry. "What is winter? the banishment of summer. What is spring? the painter of the earth. What is the year? the world's chariot. What is the sun? the splendour of the world, the beauty of heaven, the grace of nature, the honour of day, the distributor of the hours. What is the sea? the path of audacity, the boundary of the earth, the receptacle of the rivers, the fountain of showers." More, he ends his instructions with enigmas, in the spirit of the Skalds, such as we still find in the old manuscripts with the barbarian songs. It was the last feature of the national genius, which, when it labours to understand a matter, neglects dry, clear, consecutive deduction, to employ grotesque, remote, oft repeated imagery, and replaces analysis by intuition.

### VIII.

Such was this race, the last born of the sister races, which, in the decay of the other two, the Latin and the Greek, brings to the world a new civilisation, with a new character and genius. Inferior to these in many respects, it surpasses them in not a few. Amidst the woods and mire and snows, under a sad, inclement sky, gross instincts have gained the day during this long barbarism. The German has not acquired gay humour, unreserved facility, the feeling for harmonious beauty; his great phlegmatic body continues savage and stiff, greedy and brutal; his rude and unpliant mind is still inclined to savagery, and restive under culture. Dull and congealed, his ideas cannot expand with facility and freedom, with a natural sequence and an instinctive regularity. But this spirit, void of the

sentiment of the beautiful, is all the more apt for the sentiment of the true. The deep and incisive impression which he receives from contact with objects, and which as yet he can only express by a cry, will afterwards liberate him from the Latin rhetoric, and will vent itself on things rather than on words. Moreover, under the constraint of climate and solitude, by the habit of resistance and effort, his ideal is changed. Manly and moral instincts have gained the empire over him ; and amongst them the need of independence, the disposition for serious and strict manners, the inclination for devotion and veneration, the worship of heroism. Here are the foundations and the elements of a civilisation, slower but sounder, less careful of what is agreeable and elegant, more based on justice and truth.<sup>1</sup> Hitherto at least the race is intact, intact in its primitive coarseness ; the Roman cultivation could neither develop nor deform it. If Christianity took root, it was owing to natural affinities, but it produced no change in the native genius. Now approaches a new conquest, which is to bring this time men, as well as ideas. The Saxons, meanwhile, after the wont of German races, vigorous and fertile, have within the past six centuries multiplied enormously. They were now about two millions, and the Norman army numbered sixty thousand.<sup>2</sup> In vain

<sup>1</sup> In Iceland, the country of the fiercest sea-kings, crimes are unknown ; prisons have been turned to other uses ; fines are the only punishment.

<sup>2</sup> Following Doomsday Book, Mr. Turner reckons at three hundred thousand the heads of families mentioned. If each family consisted of five persons, that would make one million five hundred thousand people. He adds five hundred thousand for the four northern counties, for London and several large towns, for the monks and provincial clergy not enumerated. . . . We must accept these figures with caution. Still

these Normans become transformed, gallicised ; by their origin, and substantially in themselves they are still the relatives of those whom they conquered. In vain they imported their manners and their poesy, and introduced into the language a third part of its words ; this language continues altogether German in element and in substance.<sup>1</sup> Though the grammar changed, it changed integrally, by an internal action, in the same sense as its continental cognates. At the end of three hundred years the conquerors themselves were conquered ; their speech became English ; and owing to frequent inter-marriage, the English blood ended by gaining the predominance over the Norman blood in their veins. The race finally remains Saxon. If the old poetic genius disappears after the Conquest, it is as a river disappears, and flows for a while underground. In five centuries it will emerge once more.<sup>1</sup>

they agree with those of Mackintosh, George Chalmers, and several others. Many facts show that the Saxon population was very numerous, and quite out of proportion to the Norman population.

<sup>1</sup> Warton, *History of English Poetry*, 1840, 8 vols. preface.

## CHAPTER II.

*The Normans.*

## I.

A CENTURY and a half had passed on the Continent since, amid the universal decay and dissolution, a new society had been formed, and new men had risen up. Brave men had at length made a stand against the Norsemen and the robbers. They had planted their feet in the soil, and the moving chaos of the general subsidence had become fixed by the effort of their great hearts and of their arms. At the mouths of the rivers, in the defiles of the mountains, on the margin of the waste borders, at all perilous passes, they had built their forts, each for himself, each on his own land, each with his faithful band; and they had lived like a scattered but watchful army, encamped and confederate in their castles, sword in hand, in front of the enemy. Beneath this discipline a formidable people had been formed, fierce hearts in strong bodies,<sup>1</sup> intolerant of restraint,

<sup>1</sup> See, amidst other delineations of their manners, the first accounts of the first Crusade. Godfrey clove a Saracen down to his waist.—In Palestine, a widow was compelled, up to the age of sixty, to marry again, because no fief could remain without a defender.—A Spanish leader said to his exhausted soldiers after a battle, "You are too weary and too much wounded, but come and fight with me against this other band; the fresh wounds which we shall receive will make us forget those which we have." At this time, says the General Chronicle of Spain, kings, counts, and nobles, and all the knights, that they might be ever ready, kept their horses in the chamber where they slept with their wives.

longing for violent deeds, born for constant warfare because steeped in permanent warfare, heroes and robbers, who, as an escape from their solitude, plunged into adventures, and went, that they might conquer a country or win Paradise, to Sicily, to Portugal, to Spain, to Livonia, to Palestine, to England.

## II.

On the 27th of September 1066, at the mouth of the Somme, there was a great sight to be seen: four hundred large sailing vessels, more than a thousand transports, and sixty thousand men, were on the point of embarking.<sup>1</sup> The sun shone splendidly after long rain; trumpets sounded, the cries of this armed multitude rose to heaven; as far as the eye could see, on the shore, in the wide-spreading river on the sea which opens out thence broad and shining, masts and sails extended like a forest; the enormous fleet set out, wafted by the south wind.<sup>2</sup> The people which it carried were said to have come from Norway, and they might have been taken for kinsmen of the Saxons, with whom they were to fight; but there were with them a multitude of adventurers, crowding from all quarters, far and near, from north and south, from Maine and Anjou, from Poitou and Brittany, from Ile-de-France and Flanders, from Aquitaine and Burgundy;<sup>3</sup> and, in short, the expedition itself was French.

<sup>1</sup> For difference in numbers of the fleet and men, see Freeman, *Hist. of the Norm. Conq.*, 3 vols. 1867, iii. 381, 387.—Tr.

<sup>2</sup> For all the details, see *Anglo-Norman Chronicles*, iii. 4, as quoted by Aug. Thierry. I have myself seen the locality and the country.

<sup>3</sup> Of three columns of attack at Hastings, two were composed of auxiliaries. Moreover, the chroniclers are not at fault upon this critical point; they agree in stating that England was conquered by Frenchmen.

How comes it that, having kept its name, it had changed its nature? and what series of renovations had made a Latin out of a German people? The reason is that this people, when they came to Neustria, were neither a national body, nor a pure race. They were but a band; and as such, marrying the women of the country, they introduced foreign blood into their children. They were a Scandinavian band, but swelled by all the bold knaves and all the wretched desperadoes who wandered about the conquered country:<sup>1</sup> and as such they received foreign blood into their veins. Moreover, if the nomadic band was mixed, the settled band was much more so; and peace by its transfusions, like war by its recruits, had changed the character of the primitive blood. When Rollo, having divided the land amongst his followers, hung the thieves and their abettors, people from every country gathered to him. Security, good stern justice, were so rare, that they were enough to re-people a land.<sup>2</sup> He invited strangers, say the old writers, "and made one people out of so many folk of different natures." This assemblage of barbarians, refugees, robbers, immigrants, spoke Romance or French so quickly, that the second Duke, wishing to have his son taught Danish, had to send him to Bayeux, where it was still spoken. The great masses always form the race in the end, and generally the genius and language. Thus this people, so transformed, quickly became polished; the composite race showed itself of a

<sup>1</sup> It was a Rouen fisherman, a soldier of Rollo, who killed the Duke of France at the mouth of the Eure. Hastings, the famous sea-king, was a labourer's son from the neighbourhood of Troyes.

<sup>2</sup> "In the tenth century," says Stendhal, "a man wished for two things: 1st, not to be slain; 2d, to have a good leather coat." See Fontenelle's *Chronicle*.

ready genius, far more wary than the Saxons across the Channel, closely resembling their neighbours of Picardy, Champagne, and Ile-de-France. "The Saxons," says an old writer,<sup>1</sup> "vied with each other in their drinking feats, and wasted their income by day and night in feasting, whilst they lived in wretched hovels; the French and Normans, on the other hand, living inexpensively in their fine large houses, were besides refined in their food and studiously careful in their dress." The former, still weighted by the German phlegm, were gluttons and drunkards, now and then aroused by poetical enthusiasm; the latter, made sprightlier by their transplantation and their alloy, felt the cravings of the mind already making themselves manifest. "You might see amongst them churches in every village, and monasteries in the cities, towering on high, and built in a style unknown before," first in Normandy, and later in England.<sup>2</sup> Taste had come to them at once—that is, the desire to please the eye, and to express a thought by outward representation, which was quite a new idea: the circular arch was raised on one or on a cluster of columns; elegant mouldings were placed about the windows; the rose window made its appearance, simple yet, like the flower which gives it its name "*rose des buissons*;" and the Norman style unfolded itself, original yet proportioned between the Gothic, whose richness it foreshadowed, and the Romance, whose solidity it recalled.

With taste, just as natural and just as quickly, was developed the spirit of inquiry. Nations are like

<sup>1</sup> William of Malmesbury.

<sup>2</sup> Churches in London, Sarum, Norwich, Durham, Chichester, Peterborough, Rochester, Hereford, Gloucester, Oxford, etc.—William of Malmesbury.



children; with some the tongue is readily loosened, and they comprehend at once; with others it is loosened with difficulty, and they are slow of comprehension. The men we are here speaking of had educated themselves nimbly, as Frenchmen do. They were the first in France who unravelled the language, regulating it and writing it so well, that to this day we understand their codes and their poems. In a century and a half they were so far cultivated as to find the Saxons "unlettered and rude."<sup>1</sup> That was the excuse they made for banishing them from the abbeys and all valuable ecclesiastical offices. And, in fact, this excuse was rational, for they instinctively hated gross stupidity. Between the Conquest and the death of King John, they established five hundred and fifty-seven schools in England. Henry Beauclerk, son of the Conqueror, was trained in the sciences; so were Henry II. and his three sons: Richard, the eldest of these, was a poet. Lanfranc, first Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, a subtle logician, ably argued the Real Presence; Anselm, his successor, the first thinker of the age, thought he had discovered a new proof of the existence of God, and tried to make religion philosophical by adopting as his maxim, "*Crede ut intelligas*." The notion was doubtless grand, especially in the eleventh century; and they could not have gone more promptly to work. Of course the science I speak of was but scholastic, and these terrible folios slay more understandings than they confirm. But people must begin as they can; and syllogism, even in Latin, even in theology, is yet an exercise of the mind and a proof of the understanding. Among the continental priests who settled in

<sup>1</sup> Ordericus Vitalis.

England, one established a library; another, founder of a school, made the scholars perform the play of Saint Catherine; a third wrote in polished Latin, "epigrams as pointed as those of Martial." Such were the recreations of an intelligent race, eager for ideas, of ready and flexible genius, whose clear thought was not clouded, like that of the Saxon brain, by drunken hallucinations, and the vapours of a greedy and well-filled stomach. They loved conversations, tales of adventure. Side by side with their Latin chroniclers, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, thoughtful men already, who could not only relate, but criticise here and there, there were rhyming chronicles in the vulgar tongue, as those of Geoffroy Gaimar, Bénéot de Sainte-Maure, Robert Wace. Do not imagine that their verse-writers were sterile of words or lacking in details. They were talkers, tale-tellers, speakers above all, ready of tongue, and never stinted in speech. Not singers by any means; they speak—this is their strong point, in their poems as in their chronicles. They were the earliest who wrote the *Song of Roland*; upon this they accumulated a multitude of songs concerning Charlemagne and his peers, concerning Arthur and Merlin, the Greeks and Romans, King Horn, Guy of Warwick, every prince and every people. Their minstrels (*trouvères*), like their knights, draw in abundance from Welsh, Franks, and Latins, and descend upon East and West, in the wide field of adventure. They address themselves to a spirit of inquiry, as the Saxons to enthusiasm, and dilute in their long, clear, and flowing narratives the lively colours of German and Breton traditions; battles, surprises, single combats, embassies, speeches, processions, ceremonies, huntings,

a variety of amusing events, employ their ready and wandering imaginations. At first, in the *Song of Roland*, it is still kept in check; it walks with long strides, but only walks. Presently its wings have grown; incidents are multiplied; giants and monsters abound, the natural disappears, the song of the *jongleur* grows a poem under the hands of the *trouvère*; he would speak, like Nestor of old, five, even six years running, and not grow tired or stop. Forty thousand verses are not too much to satisfy their gabble; a facile mind, copious, inquisitive, descriptive, such is the genius of the race. The Gauls, their fathers, used to delay travellers on the road to make them tell their stories, and boasted, like these, "of fighting well and talking with ease."

With chivalric poetry, they are not wanting in chivalry; principally, it may be, because they are strong, and a strong man loves to prove his strength by knocking down his neighbours; but also from a desire of fame, and as a point of honour. By this one word honour the whole spirit of warfare is changed. Saxon poets painted war as a murderous fury, as a blind madness which shook flesh and blood, and awakened the instincts of the beast of prey; Norman poets describe it as a tourney. The new passion which they introduce is that of vanity and gallantry; Guy of Warwick dismounts all the knights in Europe, in order to deserve the hand of the prude and scornful Félice. The tourney itself is but a ceremony, somewhat brutal I admit, since it turns upon the breaking of arms and limbs, but yet brilliant and French. To show skill and courage, display the magnificence of dress and armour, be applauded by and please the ladies,—such

feelings indicate men of greater sociality, more under the influence of public opinion, less the slaves of their own passions, void both of lyric inspiration and savage enthusiasm, gifted by a different genius, because inclined to other pleasures.

Such were the men who at this moment were disembarking in England to introduce their new manners and a new spirit, French at bottom, in mind and speech, though with special and provincial features; of all the most matter-of-fact, with an eye to the main chance, calculating, having the nerve and the dash of our own soldiers, but with the tricks and precautions of lawyers, heroic undertakers of profitable enterprises; having gone to Sicily and Naples, and ready to travel to Constantinople or Antioch, so it be to take a country or bring back money; subtle politicians, accustomed in Sicily to hire themselves to the highest bidder, and capable of doing a stroke of business in the heat of the Crusade, like Bohémond, who, before Antioch, speculated on the dearth of his Christian allies, and would only open the town to them under condition of their keeping it for himself; methodical and persevering conquerors, expert in administration, and fond of scribbling on paper, like this very William, who was able to organise such an expedition, and such an army, and kept a written roll of the same, and who proceeded to register the whole of England in his Domesday Book. Sixteen days after the disembarkation, the contrast between the two nations was manifested at Hastings by its visible effects.

The Saxons "ate and drank the whole night. You might have seen them struggling much, and leaping and

singing" with shouts of laughter and noisy joy.<sup>1</sup> In the morning they packed behind their palisades the dense masses of their heavy infantry, and with battle-axe hung round their neck awaited the attack. The wary Normans weighed the chances of heaven and hell, and tried to enlist God upon their side. Robert Wace, their historian and compatriot, is no more troubled by poetical imagination than they were by warlike inspiration; and on the eve of the battle his mind is as prosaic and clear as theirs.<sup>2</sup> The same spirit showed itself in the battle. They were for the most part bowmen and horsemen, well-skilled, nimble, and clever. Taillefer, the *jongleur*, who asked for the honour of striking the first blow, went singing, like a true French volunteer, performing tricks all the while.<sup>3</sup> Having arrived before the English, he

<sup>1</sup> Robert Wace, *Roman du Rou.*

*Ibid.*

Et li Normanz et li Franceis  
Tote nuit firent oreisons,  
Et furent en afficions.  
De lor péchiés confes se firent  
As proveires les regehirant,  
Et qui n'en ont proveires près,  
A son veizin se fist confes,  
Pour ço ke samedi esteit  
Ke la bataille estre debveit.

Unt Normanz a promis e voé,  
Si com li cler l'orent loé,  
Ke à ce jor mes s'il veakeient,  
Char ni saune ne mangereient  
Giffrei, éveske de Coustances,  
A plusors joint lor pénitances.  
Chi reçut li confessions  
Et dona li bèneçoins.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Wace, *Roman du Rou :*

Taillefer ki moult bien cantout  
Sur un rousain qui tot alout  
Devant li dus alout cantant  
De Kalermaine e de Rolant,  
E d'Oliver et des vassals  
Ki moururent à Roncevals.  
Quant ils orent chevalchié tant  
K'as Engleis vindrent aprismant  
"Sires ! dist Taillefer, merci !  
Je vos ai langnement servi.

Tut mon servise me debves,  
Hui, si vos plaist, me le rendes  
Por tout guerredun vos requier,  
Et si vos voil forment preier,  
Otrelez-meï, ke jo n'i faille,  
Li primier colp de la bataille."  
Et li dus répent : " Je l'otrel."  
Et Taillefer point à desrei ;  
Devant tos li altres se mist,  
Un Engles sêri, si l'ocist.

cast his lance three times in the air, then his sword, and caught them again by the handle; and Harold's clumsy foot-soldiers, who only knew how to cleave coats of mail by blows from their battle-axes, "were astonished, saying to one another that it was magic." As for William, amongst a score of prudent and cunning actions, he performed two well-calculated ones, which, in this sore embarrassment, brought him safe out of his difficulties. He ordered his archers to shoot into the air; the arrows wounded many of the Saxons in the face, and one of them pierced Harold in the eye. After this he simulated flight; the Saxons, intoxicated with joy and wrath, quitted their entrenchments, and exposed themselves to the lances of his horsemen. During the remainder of the contest they only make a stand by small companies, fight with fury, and end by being slaughtered. The strong, mettlesome, brutal race threw themselves on the enemy like a savage bull; the dexterous Norman hunters wounded them adroitly, knocked them down, and placed them under the yoke.

### III.

What then is this French race, which by arms and letters makes such a splendid entrance upon the world, and is so manifestly destined to rule, that in the East, for example, their name of Franks will be given to all the nations of the West? Wherein consists this new spirit, this precocious pioneer, this key of all middle-age civilisation? There is in every mind of the kind

De ses le pia, parmi la pance,  
Li fist passer ultre la lance,  
A terre estendu l'abati.  
Poiz trait l'espée, altre féri.

Poiz a crié : " Venez, venez !  
Ke fetes-vos ! Férez, férez ! "  
Donc l'unt Englez avironé.  
Al second colp k'il ou doné.

a fundamental activity which, when incessantly repeated, moulds its plan, and gives it its direction; in town or country, cultivated or not, in its infancy and its age, it spends its existence and employs its energy in conceiving an event or an object. This is its original and perpetual process; and whether it change its region, return, advance, prolong, or alter its course, its whole motion is but a series of consecutive steps; so that the least alteration in the size, quickness, or precision of its primitive stride transforms and regulates the whole course, as in a tree the structure of the first shoot determines the whole foliage, and governs the whole growth.<sup>1</sup> When the Frenchman conceives an event or an object, he conceives quickly and distinctly; there is no internal disturbance, no previous fermentation of confused and violent ideas, which, becoming concentrated and elaborated, end in a noisy outbreak. The movement of his intelligence is nimble and prompt like that of his limbs; at once and without effort he seizes upon his idea. But he seizes that alone; he leaves on one side all the long entangling offshoots whereby it is entwined and twisted amongst its neighbouring ideas; he does not embarrass himself with nor think of them; he detaches, plucks, touches but slightly, and that is all. He is deprived, or if you prefer it, he is exempt from those sudden half-visions which disturb a man, and open up to him instantaneously vast deeps and far perspectives. Images are excited by internal commotion; he, not being so moved, imagines not. He is only moved superficially; he is without large sympathy; he does not perceive an object as it is, complex and combined, but in parts, with

<sup>1</sup> The idea of types is applicable throughout all physical and moral nature.

a discursive and superficial knowledge. That is why no race in Europe is less poetical. Let us look at their epics; none are more prosaic. They are not wanting in number: *The Song of Roland*, *Garin le Loherain*, *Ogier le Danois*,<sup>1</sup> *Berthe aux grands Pieds*. There is a library of them. Though their manners are heroic and their spirit fresh, though they have originality, and deal with grand events, yet, spite of this, the narrative is as dull as that of the babbling Norman chroniclers. Doubtless when Homer relates he is as clear as they are, and he develops as they do: but his magnificent titles of rosy-fingered Morn, the wide-bosomed Air, the divine and nourishing Earth, the earth-shaking Ocean, come in every instant and expand their purple bloom over the speeches and battles, and the grand abounding similes which interrupt the narrative tell of a people more inclined to enjoy beauty than to proceed straight to fact. But here we have facts, always facts, nothing but facts; the Frenchman wants to know if the hero will kill the traitor, the lover wed the maiden; he must not be delayed by poetry or painting. He advances nimbly to the end of the story, not lingering for dreams of the heart or wealth of landscape. There is no splendour, no colour, in his narrative; his style is quite bare, and without figures; you may read ten thousand verses in these old poems without meeting one. Shall we open the most ancient, the most original, the most eloquent, at the most moving point, the *Song of Roland*, when Roland is dying? The narrator is moved, and yet his language remains the same, smooth, accentless, so penetrated by the prosaic spirit, and so void of the poetic! He gives an abstract of motives, a summary of events, a series

<sup>1</sup> *Danois* is a contraction of *le d'Ardennois*, from the Ardennes.—T.R.



of causes for grief, a series of causes for consolation.<sup>1</sup> Nothing more. These men regard the circumstance or the action by itself, and adhere to this view. Their idea remains exact, clear, and simple, and does not raise up a similar image to be confused with the first, to colour or transform itself. It remains dry ; they conceive

<sup>1</sup> Gemin, *Chanson de Roland* :

Co sent Rollans que la mort le trespent,  
 Devers la teste sur le quer li descent ;  
 Desus un pin i est alet curant,  
 Sur l'herbe verte si est culchet adens ;  
 Desus lui met l'espée et l'olifan ;  
 Turnat sa teste vers la paiens gent,  
 Pour ço l'at fait que il voelt veirement  
 Que Carles diet e trastute sa gent,  
 Li gentilz quens, qu'il fut mort cunquérant.  
 Cleimet sa culpe, e menut e suvent,  
 Pur ses pecchez en puroffrid lo guant.  
 Li quens Rollans se jut desus un pin,  
 Envers Espaigne en ad turnet sun vis,  
 De plusurs choses a remembrer le prist.  
 De tantes terres cume li bers cunquist,  
 De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,  
 De Carlemagne sun seignor ki l'nurrit.  
 Ne poet muer n'en plurt et ne susprit.  
 Mais lui meisme ne volt mettre en ubli.  
 Cleimet sa culpe, si priet Dieu mercoit :  
 " Veire paterne, ki unques ne mentia,  
 Seint Lazaron de mort resurrexia,  
 Et Daniel des lions guaresia,  
 Guaris de mei l'arome de tus perils,  
 Pur les pecchez que en ma vie fia."  
 Sun destre guant à Deu en puroffrit.  
 Seint Gabriel de sa main l'ad pria.  
 Desur sun bras teneit le chef enolln,  
 Juntas ses mains est alet à sa fin.  
 Deus i tramist sun angle cherubin,  
 Et seint Michel qu'on cleimet del péril  
 Ensemble ad els seint Gabriel i vint,  
 L'anme del cunte portent en pareia.

the divisions of the object one by one, without ever collecting them, as the Saxons would, in an abrupt impassioned, glowing semi-vision. Nothing is more opposed to their genius than the genuine songs and profound hymns, such as the English monks were singing beneath the low vaults of their churches. They would be disconcerted by the unevenness and obscurity of such language. They are not capable of such an access of enthusiasm and such excess of emotion. They never cry out, they speak, or rather they converse, and that at moments when the soul, overwhelmed by its trouble might be expected to cease thinking and feeling. Thus Amis, in a mystery-play, being leprous, calmly requires his friend Amille to slay his two sons, in order that their blood may heal him of his leprosy; and Amille replies still more calmly,<sup>1</sup> If ever they try to sing, even in heaven, "a roundelay high and clear," they will produce little rhymed arguments, as dull as the dullest talk.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mon très-chier ami débonnaire,  
Vous m'avez une chose ditte  
Qui n'est pas à faire petite  
Mais que l'on doit moult resongier.  
Et nonpourquant, sanz calongnier,  
Puisque garison autrement  
Ne poves avoir vraiment,  
Pour vostre amour les occiray,  
Et le sang vous apporteray.  
Vrais Diex, moult est excellente,  
Et de grant charité plaine,  
Vostre bonté souveraine.  
Car vostre grâce présente,  
A toute personne humaine,  
Vrais Diex, moult est excellente,  
Puisqu'elle a cuer et entente,  
Et que à ce desir l'amaine  
Que de vous servir se paine.

Pursue this literature to its conclusion ; regard it, like that of the Skalds, at the time of its decadence, when its vices, being exaggerated, display, like those of the Skalds, only still more strongly the kind of mind which produced it. The Skalds fall off into nonsense ; it loses itself into babble and platitude. The Saxon could not master his craving for exaltation ; the Frenchman could not restrain the volubility of his tongue. He is too diffuse and too clear ; the Saxon is too obscure and brief. The one was excessively agitated and carried away ; the other explains and develops without measure. From the twelfth century the Gestes spun out degenerate into rhapsodies and psalmodies of thirty or forty thousand verses. Theology enters into them ; poetry becomes an interminable, intolerable litany, where the ideas, expounded, developed, and repeated *ad infinitum*, without one outburst of emotion or one touch of originality, flow like a clear and insipid stream, and send off their reader, by dint of their monotonous rhymes, into a comfortable slumber. What a deplorable abundance of distinct and facile ideas ! We meet with it again in the seventeenth century, in the literary gossip which took place at the feet of men of distinction ; it is the fault and the talent of the race. With this involuntary art of perceiving, and isolating instantaneously and clearly each part of every object, people can speak, even for speaking's sake, and for ever.

Such is the primitive process ; how will it be continued ? Here appears a new trait in the French genius, the most valuable of all. It is necessary to comprehension that the second idea shall be contiguous to the first ; otherwise that genius is thrown out of its course and arrested ; it cannot proceed by irregular bounds ;

it must walk step by step, on a straight road; order is innate in it; without study, and in the first place, it disjoins and decomposes the object or event, however complicated and entangled it may be, and sets the parts one by one in succession to each other, according to their natural connection. True, it is still in a state of barbarism; yet its intelligence is a reasoning faculty, which spreads, though unwittingly. Nothing is more clear than the style of the old French narratives and of the earliest poems: we do not perceive that we are following a narrator, so easy is the gait, so even the road he opens to us, so smoothly and gradually every idea glides into the next; and this is why he narrates so well. The chroniclers Villehardouin, Joinville, Froissart, the fathers of prose, have an ease and clearness approached by none, and beyond all, a charm, a grace, which they had not to go out of their way to find. Grace is a national possession in France, and springs from the native delicacy which has a horror of incongruities; the instinct of Frenchmen avoids violent shocks in works of taste as well as in works of argument; they desire that their sentiments and ideas shall harmonise, and not clash. Throughout they have this measured spirit, exquisitely refined.<sup>1</sup> They take care, on a sad subject, not to push emotion to its limits; they avoid big words. Think how Joinville relates in six lines the death of the poor sick priest who wished to finish celebrating the mass, and "never more did sing, and died." Open a mystery-play, *Théophilus*, or that of the *Queen of Hungary*, for instance: when they are going to burn her and her child, she says two short lines about "this gentle dew which is so pure an innocent," nothing more. Take a fabliau,

<sup>1</sup> See H. Taine, *La Fontaine and his Fables*, p. 15.

even a dramatic one : when the penitent knight, who has undertaken to fill a barrel with his tears, dies in the hermit's company, he asks from him only one last gift : "Do but embrace me, and then I'll die in the arms of my friend." Could a more touching sentiment be expressed in more sober language ? We must say of their poetry what is said of certain pictures : This is made out of nothing. Is there in the world anything more delicately graceful than the verses of Guillaume de Lorris ? Allegory clothes his ideas so as to dim their too great brightness ; ideal figures, half transparent, float about the lover, luminous, yet in a cloud, and lead him amidst all the gentle and delicate-hued ideas to the rose, whose "sweet odour embalms all the plain." This refinement goes so far, that in Thibaut of Champagne and in Charles of Orléans it turns to affectation and insipidity. In them all impressions grow more slender ; the perfume is so weak, that one often fails to catch it ; on their knees before their lady they whisper their waggeries and conceits ; they love politely and wittily ; they arrange ingeniously in a bouquet their "painted words," all the flowers of "fresh and beautiful language ;" they know how to mark fleeting ideas in their flight, soft melancholy, vague reverie ; they are as elegant as talkative, and as charming as the most amiable abbés of the eighteenth century. This lightness of touch is proper to the race, and appears as plainly under the armour and amid the massacres of the middle ages as amid the courtesies and the musk-scented, wadded coats of the last court. You will find it in their colouring as in their sentiments. They are not struck by the magnificence of nature, they see only her pretty side ; they paint the beauty of a woman by

a single feature, which is only polite, saying, "She is more gracious than the rose in May." They do not experience the terrible emotion, ecstasy, sudden oppression of heart which is displayed in the poetry of neighbouring nations; they say discreetly, "She began to smile, which vastly became her." They add, when they are in a descriptive humour, "that she had a sweet and perfumed breath," and a body "white as new-fallen snow on a branch." They do not aspire higher; beauty pleases, but does not transport them. They enjoy agreeable emotions, but are not fitted for deep sensations. The full rejuvenescence of being, the warm air of spring which renews and penetrates all existence, suggests but a pleasing couplet; they remark in passing, "Now is winter gone, the hawthorn blossoms, the rose expands," and so pass on about their business. It is a light gladness, soon gone, like that which an April landscape affords. For an instant the author glances at the mist of the streams rising about the willow trees, the pleasant vapour which imprisons the brightness of the morning; then, humming a burden of a song, he returns to his narrative. He seeks amusement, and herein lies his power.

In life, as in literature, it is pleasure he aims at, not sensual pleasure or emotion. He is lively, not voluptuous; dainty, not a glutton. He takes love for a pastime, not for an intoxication. It is a pretty fruit which he plucks, tastes, and leaves. And we must remark yet further, that the best of the fruit in his eyes is the fact of its being forbidden. He says to himself that he is duping a husband, that "he deceives a cruel woman, and thinks he ought to obtain a pope's indulgence for the deed."<sup>1</sup> He wishes

<sup>1</sup> *La Fontaine, Contes, Richard Minutolo.*

to be merry—it is the state he prefers, the end and aim of his life; and especially to laugh at other people. The short verse of his fabliaux gambols and leaps like a schoolboy released from school, over all things respected or respectable; criticising the church, women, the great, the monks. Scoffers, banterers, our fathers have abundance both of expression and matter; and the matter comes to them so naturally, that without culture, and surrounded by coarseness, they are as delicate in their raillery as the most refined. They touch upon ridicule lightly, they mock without emphasis, as it were innocently; their style is so harmonious, that at first sight we make a mistake, and do not see any harm in it. They seem artless; they look so very demure; only a word shows the imperceptible smile: it is the ass, for example, which they call the high priest, by reason of his padded cassock and his serious air, and who gravely begins “to play the organ.” At the close of the history, the delicate sense of comicality has touched you, though you cannot say how. They do not call things by their names, especially in love matters; they let you guess it; they assume that you are as sharp and knowing as themselves.<sup>1</sup> A man might discriminate, embellish at times, perhaps refine upon them, but their first traits are incomparable. When the fox approaches the raven to steal the cheese, he begins as a hypocrite, piously and cautiously, and as one of the family. He calls the raven his “good father Don Rohart, who sings so well;” he praises his voice, “so sweet and fine.” “You would be the best singer in the world if you

<sup>1</sup> Parler lui vent d'une besogne  
 Où crois que peu conquerrerois  
 Si la besogne vous nommois.

kept clear of nuts." Reynard is a rogue, an artist in the way of invention, not a mere glutton; he loves roguery for its own sake; he rejoices in his superiority, and draws out his mockery. When Tibert, the cat, by his counsel hung himself at the bell rope, wishing to ring it, he uses irony, enjoys and relishes it, pretends to wax impatient with the poor fool whom he has caught, calls him proud, complains because the other does not answer, and because he wishes to rise to the clouds and visit the saints. And from beginning to end this long epic of Reynard the Fox is the same; the raillery never ceases, and never fails to be agreeable. Reynard has so much wit, that he is pardoned for everything. The necessity for laughter is national—so indigenous to the French, that a stranger cannot understand, and is shocked by it. This pleasure does not resemble physical joy in any respect, which is to be despised for its grossness; on the contrary, it sharpens the intelligence, and brings to light many a delicate or ticklish idea. The fabliaux are full of truths about men, and still more about women, about people of low rank, and still more about those of high rank; it is a method of philosophising by stealth and boldly, in spite of conventionalism, and in opposition to the powers that be. This taste has nothing in common either with open satire, which is offensive because it is cruel; on the contrary, it provokes good humour. We soon see that the jester is not ill-disposed, that he does not wish to wound: if he stings, it is as a bee, without venom; an instant later he is not thinking of it; if need be, he will take himself as an object of his pleasantry; all he wishes is to keep up in himself and in us sparkling and pleasing ideas. Do we not see here in advance an abstract of



the whole French literature, the incapacity for great poetry, the sudden and durable perfection of prose, the excellence of all the moods of conversation and eloquence, the reign and tyranny of taste and method, the art and theory of development and arrangement, the gift of being measured, clear, amusing, and piquant? We have taught Europe how ideas fall into order, and which ideas are agreeable; and this is what our Frenchmen of the eleventh century are about to teach their Saxons during five or six centuries, first with the lance, next with the stick, next with the birch.

## IV.

Consider, then, this Frenchman or Norman, this man from Anjou or Maine, who in his well-knit coat of mail, with sword and lance, came to seek his fortune in England. He took the manor of some slain Saxon, and settled himself in it with his soldiers and comrades, gave them land, houses, the right of levying taxes, on condition of their fighting under him and for him, as men-at-arms, marshals, standard-bearers; it was a league in case of danger. In fact, they were in a hostile and conquered country, and they have to maintain themselves. Each one hastened to build for himself a place of refuge, castle or fortress,<sup>1</sup> well fortified, of solid stone, with narrow windows, strengthened with battlements, garrisoned by soldiers, pierced with loopholes. Then these men went to Salisbury, to the number of sixty thousand, all holders of land, having at least enough to maintain a man with horse or arms. There, placing their hands in William's, they promised him fealty and assistance; and the king's edict declared that they must be all united and bound

<sup>1</sup> At King Stephen's death there were 1115 castles.

together like brothers in arms, to defend and succour each other. They are an armed colony, stationary, like the Spartans amongst the Helots; and they make laws accordingly. When a Frenchman is found dead in any district, the inhabitants are to give up the murderer, or failing to do so, they must pay forty-seven marks as a fine; if the dead man is English, it rests with the people of the place to prove it by the oath of four near relatives of the deceased. They are to beware of killing a stag, boar, or fawn; for an offence against the forest-laws they will lose their eyes. They have nothing of all their property assured to them except as alms, or on condition of paying tribute, or by taking the oath of allegiance. Here a free Saxon proprietor is made a body-slave on his own estate.<sup>1</sup> Here a noble and rich Saxon lady feels on her shoulder the weight of the hand of a Norman valet, who is become by force her husband or her lover. There were Saxons of one sol, or of two sols, according to the sum which they gained for their masters; they sold them, hired them, worked them on joint account, like an ox or an ass. One Norman abbot has his Saxon predecessors dug up, and their bones thrown without the gates. Another keeps men-at-arms, who bring his recalcitrant monks to reason by blows of their swords. Imagine, if you can, the pride of these new lords, conquerors, strangers, masters, nourished by habits of violent activity, and by the savagery, ignorance, and passions of feudal life. "They thought they might do whatsoever they pleased," say the old chroniclers. "They shed blood indiscriminately, snatched the morsel of bread from the mouth of the wretched, and seized upon all the money, the goods, the land."<sup>2</sup> Thus "all the folk in the low country were

<sup>1</sup> A. Thierry, *Histoire de la Conquête de l'Angleterre*, ii.

<sup>2</sup> William of Malmesbury. A. Thierry, ii. 20. 122-203.

at great pains to seem humble before Ivo Taille-bois, and only to address him with one knee on the ground; but although they made a point of paying him every honour, and giving him all and more than all which they owed him in the way of rent and service, he harassed, tormented, tortured, imprisoned them, set his dogs upon their cattle, . . . broke the legs and backbones of their beasts of burden, . . . and sent men to attack their servants on the road with sticks and swords."<sup>1</sup> The Normans would not and could not borrow any idea or custom from such boors;<sup>2</sup> they despised them as coarse and stupid. They stood amongst them, as the Spaniards amongst the Americans in the sixteenth century, superior in force and culture, more versed in letters, more expert in the arts of luxury. They preserved their manners and their speech. England, to all outward appearance—the court of the king, the castles of the nobles, the palaces of the bishops, the houses of the wealthy—was French; and the Scandinavian people, of whom sixty years ago the Saxon kings used to have poems sung to them, thought that the nation had forgotten its language, and treated it in their laws as though it were no longer their sister.

It was a French literature, then, which was at this time domiciled across the channel,<sup>3</sup> and the conquerors tried to make it purely French, purged from all Saxon alloy. They made such a point of this, that the nobles in the reign of Henry II. sent their sons to France, to

<sup>1</sup> A. Thierry.

<sup>2</sup> "In the year 652," says Warton, i. 3, "it was the common practice of the Anglo-Saxons to send their youth to the monasteries of France for education; and not only the language but the manners of the French were esteemed the most polite accomplishments."

<sup>3</sup> Warton, i. 5.

preserve them from barbarisms. "For two hundred years," says Higden,<sup>1</sup> "children in scole, agenst the usage and manir of all other nations beeth compelled for to leve hire own langage, and for to construe hir lessons and hire thynges in Frensche." The statutes of the universities obliged the students to converse either in French or Latin. "Gentilmen children beeth taught to speke Frensche from the tyme that they bith rokked in hire cradell; and uplondissche men will likne himself to gentylmen, and fondeth with greet besynesse for to speke Frensche." Of course the poetry is French. The Norman brought his minstrel with him; there was Taillefer, the *jongleur*, who sang the *Song of Roland* at the battle of Hastings; there was Adeline, the *jongleuse*, who received an estate in the partition which followed the Conquest. The Norman who ridiculed the Saxon kings, who dug up the Saxon saints, and cast them without the walls of the church, loved none but French ideas and verses. It was into French verse that Robert Wace rendered the legendary history of the England which was conquered, and the actual history of the Normandy in which he continued to live. Enter one of the abbeys where the minstrels come to sing, "where the clerks after dinner and supper read poems, the chronicles of kingdoms, the wonders of the world,"<sup>2</sup> you will only find Latin or French verses, Latin or French prose. What becomes

<sup>1</sup> Trevisa's translation of the *Polyconyon*.

<sup>2</sup> Statutes of foundation of New College, Oxford. In the abbey of Glastonbury, in 1247: *Liber de excidio Troja, gesta Ricardi regis, gesta Alexandri Magni, etc.* In the abbey of Peterborough: *Amys et Amelion, Sir Tristram, Guy de Bourgogne, gesta Otuelis, les prophéties de Merlin, le Charlemagne de Turpin, la destruction de Troie, etc.* Warton, *ibidem*.





*JOHN GOWER*





of English? Obscure, despised, we hear it no more, except in the mouths of degraded franklins, outlaws of the forest, swineherds, peasants, the lowest orders. It is no longer, or scarcely written; gradually we find in the Saxon chronicle that the idiom alters, is extinguished; the chronicle itself ceases within a century after the Conquest.<sup>1</sup> The people who have leisure or security enough to read or write are French; for them authors devise and compose; literature always adapts itself to the taste of those who can appreciate and pay for it. Even the English<sup>2</sup> endeavour to write in French: thus Robert Grosstête, in his allegorical poem on Christ; Peter Langtoft, in his *Chronicle of England*, and in his *Life of Thomas à Becket*; Hugh de Rothe-land, in his poem of *Hippomedon*; John Hoveden, and many others. Several write the first half of the verse in English, and the second in French; a strange sign of the ascendancy which is moulding and oppressing them. Even in the fifteenth century,<sup>3</sup> many of these poor folk are employed in this task; French is the language of the court, from it arose all poetry and elegance; he is but a clodhopper who is inapt at that style. They apply themselves to it as our old scholars did to Latin verses; they are gallicised as those were latinised, by constraint, with a sort of fear, knowing well that they are but schoolboys and provincials. Gower, one of their best poets, at the end of his French works, excuses himself humbly for not having "de Français la faconde. Pardonnez moi," he says, "que de ce je forsvoie; je suis Anglais."

<sup>1</sup> In 1154.

<sup>2</sup> Warton, i. 72-78.

<sup>3</sup> In 1400. Warton, ii. 248. Gower died in 1408; his French ballads belong to the end of the fourteenth century.

And yet, after all, neither the race nor the tongue has perished. It is necessary that the Norman should learn English, in order to command his tenants ; his Saxon wife speaks it to him, and his sons receive it from the lips of their nurse ; the contagion is strong, for he is obliged to send them to France, to preserve them from the jargon which on his domain threatens to overwhelm and spoil them. From generation to generation the contagion spreads ; they breathe it in the air, with the foresters in the chase, the farmers in the field, the sailors on the ships : for these coarse people, shut in by their animal existence, are not the kind to learn a foreign language ; by the simple weight of their dulness they impose their idiom on their conquerors, at all events such words as pertain to living things. Scholarly speech, the language of law, abstract and philosophical expressions,—in short, all words depending on reflection and culture may be French, since there is nothing to prevent it. This is just what happens ; these kind of ideas and this kind of speech are not understood by the commonalty, who, not being able to touch them, cannot change them. This produces a French, a colonial French, doubtless perverted, pronounced with closed mouth, with a contortion of the organs of speech, “after the school of Stratford-atte-Bow ;” yet it is still French. On the other hand, as regards the speech employed about common actions and visible objects, it is the people, the Saxons, who fix it ; these living words are too firmly rooted in his experience to allow of being parted with, and thus the whole substance of the language comes from him. Here, then, we have the Norman who, slowly and constrainedly, speaks and understands English, a deformed, gallicised English, yet English, in sap and root ;

but he has taken his time about it, for it has required two centuries. It was only under Henry III. that the new tongue is complete, with the new constitution; and that, after the like fashion, by alliance and intermixture; the burgesses come to take their seats in Parliament with the nobles, at the same time that Saxon words settle down in the language side by side with French words.

## V.

So was modern English formed, by compromise, and the necessity of being understood. But we can well imagine that these nobles, even while speaking the rising dialect, have their hearts full of French tastes and ideas; France remains the home of their mind, and the literature which now begins, is but translation. Translators, copyists, imitators—there is nothing else. England is a distant province, which is to France what the United States were, thirty years ago, to Europe: she exports her wool, and imports her ideas. Open the *Voyage and Travaille of Sir John Maundeville*,<sup>1</sup> the oldest prose-writer, the Villehardouin of the country: his book is but the translation of a translation.<sup>2</sup> He writes first in Latin, the language of scholars; then in French, the

<sup>1</sup> He wrote in 1356, and died in 1372.

<sup>2</sup> "And for als moche as it is longe time passed that ther was no generalle Passage ne Vyage over the See, and many Men desiren for to here speke of the holy Lond, and han thereof gret Solace and Comfort, I, John Maundeville, Knyght, alle be it I be not worthi, that was born in Englund, in the town of Seynt-Albones, passed the See in the Zeer of our Lord Jesu-Crist 1322, in the Day of Seynt Michelle, and hidreto have been longe tyme over the Sea, and have seyn and gon thorghe manye dyverse londes, and many Provynces, and Kingdomes, and Iles.

"And zee shulle undirstonde that I have put this Boke out of Latyn into Frensche, and translated it azen out of Frensche, into Englyssche, that every Man of my Nacioun may undirstonde it."—*Sir John Maundeville's Voyage and Travails*, ed. Halliwell, 1866, prologue, p. 4.

language of society; finally he reflects, and discovers that the barons, his compatriots, by governing the Saxon churls, have ceased to speak their own Norman, and that the rest of the nation never knew it; he translates his manuscript into English, and, in addition, takes care to make it plain, feeling that he speaks to less expanded understandings. He says in French :—"Il advint une fois que Mahomet allait dans une chapelle où il y avait un saint ermite. Il entra en la chapelle où il y avait une petite huisserie et basse, et était bien petite la chapelle; et alors devint la porte si grande qu'il semblaient que ce fut la porte d'un palais."

He stops, corrects himself, wishes to explain himself better for his readers across the Channel, and says in English :—"And at the Desertes of Arabye, he wente into a Chapelle where a Eremyte dwelte. And whan he entred in to the Chapelle that was but a lyttille and a low thing, and had but a lytill Dore and a low, than the Entree began to wexe so gret and so large, and so highe, as though it had ben of a gret Mynstre, or the Zate of a Paleys."<sup>1</sup> You perceive that he amplifies, and thinks himself bound to clinch and drive in three or four times in succession the same idea, in order to get it into an English brain; his thought is drawn out, dulled, spoiled in the process. Like every copy, the new literature is mediocre, and repeats what it imitates, with fewer merits and greater faults.

Let us see, then, what our Norman baron gets translated for him; first, the chronicles of Geoffroy Gaimar

<sup>1</sup> *Sir John Maundeville's Voyages and Travels*, ed. Halliwell, 1866, xii. p. 139. It is confessed that the original on which Wace depended for his ancient *History of England* is the Latin compilation of Geoffroy of Monmouth.

and Robert Wace, which consist of the fabulous history of England continued up to their day, a dull-rhymed rhapsody, turned into English in a rhapsody no less dull. The first Englishman who attempts it is Layamon,<sup>1</sup> a monk of Ernely, still fettered in the old idiom, who sometimes happens to rhyme, sometimes fails, altogether barbarous and childish, unable to develop a continuous idea, babbling in little confused and incomplete phrases, after the fashion of the ancient Saxons; after him a monk, Robert of Gloucester,<sup>2</sup> and a canon, Robert of

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the account of the proceedings at Arthur's coronation given by Layamon, in his translation of Wace, executed about 1180. Madden's *Layamon*, 1847, ii. p. 625, *et passim* :

Tha the king igeten hafde  
And al his mon-weorede,  
Tha bugen ut of burhge  
Theines swithe balde.  
Alle tha kinges,  
And heore here-thringes.  
Alle tha biscopes,  
And alle tha clærokes,  
All the eorles,  
And alle tha beornes.  
Alle tha theines,  
Alle the swaines,  
Feire iscrudde,  
Helde geond felde.  
Summe heo gunnen sruen,  
Summe heo gunnen urnen,  
Summe heo gunnen lepen,  
Summe heo gunnen sceoten,  
Summe heo wræstleden  
And wither-gome makeden,  
Summe heo on uelde  
Fleouweden under scealde,  
Summe heo driven balles  
Wide geond tha feldes.

Monianes kunnes gomen  
Ther heo gunnen driuen.  
And wha swa mihte iwinne  
Wurthscipe of his gomene,  
Hine me ladde mid songe  
At foren than leod kinge;  
And the king, for his gomene,  
Gaf him geven gode.  
Alle tha quene  
The icumen weoren there,  
And alle tha laddies,  
Leoneden geond walles,  
To bihalden the dugethen,  
And that folc plæie.  
This ilæste threo dages,  
Swule gomes and swule plæges,  
Tha, at than veorthe dæie  
The king gon to spekene  
And agæf his goden cnihten  
All heore rihten;  
He gaf seolwer, he gaf gold,  
He gaf hora, he gaf lond,  
Castles, and clothes eke;  
His monnen he iquæda.

<sup>2</sup> After 1297.

Brunne, both as insipid and clear as their French models, having become gallicised, and adopted the significant characteristic of the race, namely, the faculty and habit of easy narration, of seeing moving spectacles without deep emotion, of writing prosaic poetry, of discoursing and developing, of believing that phrases ending in the same sounds form real poetry. Our honest English versifiers, like their preceptors in Normandy and Ile-de-France, garnished with rhymes their dissertations and histories, and called them poems. At this epoch, in fact, on the Continent, the whole learning of the schools descends into the street; and Jean de Meung, in his poem of *la Rose*, is the most tedious of doctors. So in England, Robert of Brunne transposes into verse the *Manuel des Péchés* of Bishop Grostête; Adam Davie,<sup>1</sup> certain Scripture histories; Hampole<sup>2</sup> composes the *Pricke of Conscience*. The titles alone make one yawn: what of the text?

“Mankynde mad ys to do Goddus wyll,  
 And alle Hys byddyngus to fulfille;  
 For of al Hys makying more and les,  
 Man most principal creature es.  
 Al that He made for man hit was done,  
 As ye schal here after sone.”<sup>3</sup>

There is a poem! You did not think so; call it a sermon, if you will give it its proper name. It goes on, well divided, well prolonged, flowing, but void of meaning; the literature which surrounds and resembles it bears witness of its origin by its loquacity and its clearness.

It bears witness to it by other and more agreeable

<sup>1</sup> About 1312.

<sup>2</sup> About 1349.

<sup>3</sup> Warton, ii. 93.

features. Here and there we find divergences more or less awkward into the domain of genius ; for instance, a ballad full of quips against Richard, King of the Romans, who was taken at the battle of Lewes. Sometimes, charm is not lacking, nor sweetness either. No one has ever spoken so bright and so well to the ladies as the French of the Continent, and they have not quite forgotten this talent while settling in England. You perceive it readily in the manner in which they celebrate the Virgin. Nothing could be more different from the Saxon sentiment, which is altogether biblical, than the chivalric adoration of the sovereign Lady, the fascinating Virgin and Saint, who was the real deity of the middle ages. It breathes in this pleasing hymn :

“Blessed beo thu, lavedi,  
 Ful of hovenne bliase ;  
 Swete flur of paraia,  
 Moder of milterniase. . . .  
 I-blessed beo thu, Lavedi,  
 So fair and so briht ;  
 Al min hope is uppon the,  
 Bi day and bi nicht. . . .  
 Bricht and scene quen of storre,  
 So me liht and lere.  
 In this false fikele world,  
 So me led and steore.”<sup>1</sup>

There is but a short and easy step between this tender worship of the Virgin and the sentiments of the court of love. The English rhymesters take it ; and when they wish to praise their earthly mistresses, they borrow, here as elsewhere, the ideas and the very form of French

<sup>1</sup> Time of Henry III., *Reliquiæ Antiquæ*, edited by Messrs. Wright and Halliwell, i. 102.

verse. One compares his lady to all kinds of precious stones and flowers; others sing truly amorous songs, at times sensual :

“Bytuene Mershe and Aueril,  
When spray biginneth to springe,  
The lutel foul hath hire wyl  
On hyre lud to synge,  
Ich libbe in louelonginge  
For semlokest of alle thynga.  
He may me blysse bringe,  
Icham in hire baundoun.  
An hendy hap ichabbe yhent,  
Ichot from heuene it is me sent.  
From alle wymmen my love is lent,  
And lyht on Alisoun.”<sup>1</sup>

Another sings :

“Sute lemmon, y preye the, of loue one speche,  
Whil y lyue in world so wyde other nulle y seche.  
With thy loue, my suete leof, mi bliss thou mihtes eche  
A suete cos of thy mouth mihte be my leche.”<sup>2</sup>

Is not this the lively and warm imagination of the south ? they speak of springtime and of love, “the fine and lovely weather,” like *trouvères*, even like *troubadours*. The dirty, smoke-grimed cottage, the black feudal castle, where all but the master lie higgledy-piggledy on the straw in the great stone hall, the cold rain, the muddy earth, make the return of the sun and the warm air delicious.

“Sumer is i-cumen in,  
Lhude sing cuccu :  
Groweth sed, and bloweth med,  
And springeth the wde nu.

<sup>1</sup> About 1278. Warton, i. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 31.



Sing cuccu, cuccu.  
 Awe bleteth after lomb,  
 Llouth after calue cu,  
 Bulluc sterteth, bucke *verteth* :  
 Murie sing cuccu,  
 Cuccu, cuccu.  
 Wel singes thu cuccu ;  
 Ne swik thu nauer nu.  
 Sing, cuccu nu,  
 Sing, cuccu.<sup>1</sup>

Here are glowing pictures, such as Guillaume de Lorris was writing, at the same time, even richer and more life-like, perhaps because the poet found here for inspiration that love of country life which in England is deep and national. Others, more imitative, attempt pleasantries like those of Rutebeuf and the fabliaux, frank quips,<sup>2</sup> and even satirical loose waggeries. Their true aim and end is to hit out at the monks. In every French country or country which imitates France, the most manifest use of convents is to furnish material for sprightly and scandalous stories. One writes, for instance, of the kind of life the monks lead at the abbey of Cocagne :

“There is a wel fair abbei,  
 Of white monkes and of grei.  
 Ther beth bowris and halles :  
 Al of pasteis beth the wallis,  
 Of fleis, of fisse, and rich met,  
 The likfullist that man may et.  
 Fluren cakes beth the schingles alle,  
 Of cherche, cloister, boure, and halle.

<sup>1</sup> Warton, i. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Poem of the Owl and Nightingale*, who disputes as to which has the finest voice.

The pinnes beth fat podinges  
 Rich met to princes and kinges. . . .  
 Though paradis be miri and bright  
 Cokaigh is of fairir sight. . . .  
 Another abbei is therbi,  
 Forsoth a gret fair nunnerie. . . .  
 When the someris dai is hote  
 The young nunnes takith a bote. . . .  
 And doth ham forth in that river  
 Both with ores and with sters. . . .  
 And euch monk him takith on,  
 And snellich berrith forth har prei  
 To the mochil grei abbei,  
 And techith the nunnes an creisun,  
 With iambleue up and down."

This is the triumph of gluttony and feeding. Moreover many things could be mentioned in the middle ages, which are now unmentionable. But it was the poems of chivalry which represented to him the bright side of his own mode of life, that the baron preferred to have translated. He desired that his *trouvère* should set before his eyes the magnificence which he displayed, and the luxury and enjoyments which he has introduced from France. Life at that time, without and even during war, was a great pageant, a brilliant and tumultuous kind of fête. When Henry II. travelled, he took with him a great number of horsemen, foot-soldiers, baggage-waggons, tents, pack-horses, comedians, courtesans, and their overseers, cooks, confectioners, posture-makers, dancers, barbers, go-betweens, hangers-on.<sup>1</sup> In the morning when they start, the assemblage begins to shout, sing, hustle each other, make racket and rout,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Peter of Blois.

"as if hell were let loose." William Longchamps, even in time of peace, would not travel without a thousand horses by way of escort. When Archbishop à Becket came to France, he entered the town with two hundred knights, a number of barons and nobles, and an army of servants, all richly armed and equipped, he himself being provided with four-and-twenty suits; two hundred and fifty children walked in front, singing national songs; then dogs, then carriages, then a dozen pack-horses, each ridden by an ape and a man; then equerries with shields and war-horses; then more equerries, falconers, a suite of domestics, knights, priests; lastly, the archbishop himself, with his private friends. Imagine these processions, and also these entertainments; for the Normans, after the Conquest, "borrowed from the Saxons the habit of excess in eating and drinking."<sup>1</sup> At the marriage of Richard Plantagenet, Earl of Cornwall, they provided thirty thousand dishes.<sup>2</sup> They also continued to be gallant, and punctiliously performed the great precept of the love courts; for in the middle age the sense of love was no more idle than the others. Moreover, tournaments were plentiful; a sort of opera prepared for their own entertainment. So ran their life, full of adventure and adornment, in the open air and in the sunlight, with show of cavalcades and arms; they act a pageant, and act it with enjoyment. Thus the King of Scots, having come to London with a

<sup>1</sup> William of Malmesbury.

<sup>2</sup> At the installation-feast of George Nevill, Archbishop of York, the brother of Guy of Warwick, there were consumed, 104 oxen and 6 wild bulls, 1000 sheep, 304 calves, as many hogs, 2000 swine, 500 stags, bucks, and does, 204 kids, 22,802 wild or tame fowl, 300 quarters of corn, 300 tuns of ale, 100 of wine, a pipe of hypocras, 12 porpoises and seals.

hundred knights, at the coronation of Edward I, they all dismounted, and made over their horses and superb caparisons to the people ; as did also five English lords, imitating their example. In the midst of war they took their pleasure. Edward III, in one of his expeditions against the King of France, took with him thirty falconers, and made his campaign alternately hunting and fighting.<sup>1</sup> Another time, says Froissart, the knights who joined the army carried a plaster over one eye, having vowed not to remove it until they had performed an exploit worthy of their mistresses. Out of the very exuberancy of spirit they practised the art of poetry ; out of the buoyancy of their imagination they made a sport of life. Edward III. built at Windsor a hall and a round table ; and at one of his tourneys in London, sixty ladies, seated on palfreys, led, as in a fairy tale, each her knight by a golden chain. Was not this the triumph of the gallant and frivolous French fashions ? Edward's wife Philippa sat as a model to the artists for their Madonnas. She appeared on the field of battle ; listened to Froissart, who provided her with moral-plays, love-stories, and "things fair to listen to." At once goddess, heroine, and scholar, and all this so agreeably, was she not a true queen of refined chivalry ? Now, as also in France under Louis of Orleans and the Dukes of Burgundy, this most elegant and romanesque civilisation came into full bloom, void of common sense, given up to passion, bent on pleasure, immoral and brilliant, but, like its neighbours of Italy and Provence, for lack of serious intention, it could not last.

Of all these marvels the narrators make display in

<sup>1</sup> These prodigalities and refinements grew to excess under his grandson Richard II.

their stories. Here is a picture of the vessel which took the mother of King Richard into England ;—

“Swlk on ne seygh they never non ;  
All it was whyt of huel-bon,  
And every nayl with gold begrave :  
Off pure gold was the stave.  
Her mast was of yvory ;  
Off samyte the sayl wytterly.  
Her ropes war off tuely sylk,  
Al so whyt as ony mylk.  
That noble schyp was al withoute,  
With clothys of golde sprede aboute ;  
And her loof and her wyndas,  
Off asure forsothe it was.”<sup>1</sup>

On such subjects they never run dry. When the King of Hungary wishes to console his afflicted daughter, he proposes to take her to the chase in the following style :—

“To-morrow ye shall in hunting fare :  
And ride, my daughter, in a chair ;  
It shall be covered with velvet red,  
And cloths of fine gold all about your head,  
With damask white and azure blue,  
Well diaspered with lilies new.  
Your pommels shall be ended with gold,  
Your chains enamelled many a fold,  
Your mantle of rich degree,  
Purple pall and ermine free.  
Jennets of Spain that ben so light,  
Trapped to the ground with velvet bright.  
Ye shall have harp, sautry, and song,  
And other mirths you among.

<sup>1</sup> Warton, i. 156.

Ye shall have Rumney and Malespine,  
Both hippocras and Vernage wine ;  
Montrese and wine of Greek,  
Both Algrade and despice eke,  
Antioch and Bastarde,  
Pyment also and garnarde ;  
Wine of Greek and Muscadel,  
Both clare, pyment, and Rochella,  
The reed your stomach to defy,  
And pots of osey set you by.  
You shall have venison ybake,  
The best wild fowl that may be take ;  
A leish of harehound with you to streeke,  
And hart, and hind, and other like.  
Ye shall be set at such a tryst,  
That hart and hynd shall come to you fist,  
Your disease to drive you fro,  
To hear the bugles there yblow.  
Homeward thus shall ye ride,  
On hawking by the river's side,  
With gosshawk and with gentle falcon,  
With bugle-horn and merlion.  
When you come home your menie among,  
Ye shall have revel, dance, and song ;  
Little children, great and small,  
Shall sing as does the nightingale.  
Then shall ye go to your evensong,  
With tenors and trebles among.  
Threescore of copes of damask bright,  
Full of pearls they shall be pight.  
Your censors shall be of gold,  
Indent with azure many a fold ;  
Your quire nor organ song shall want,  
With contre-note and descant.  
The other half on organs playing,  
With young children full fain singing.

Then shall ye go to your supper,  
And sit in tents in green arber,  
With cloth of arras pight to the ground,  
With sapphires set of diamond.  
A hundred knights, truly told,  
Shall play with bowls in alleys cold,  
Your disease to drive away ;  
To see the fishes in pools play,  
To a drawbridge then shall ye,  
Th' one half of stone, th' other of tree ;  
A barge shall meet you full right,  
With twenty-four oars full bright,  
With trumpets and with clarion,  
The fresh water to row up and down. . . .  
Forty torches burning bright  
At your bridge to bring you light.  
Into your chamber they shall you bring,  
With much mirth and more liking.  
Your blankets shall be of fustian,  
Your sheets shall be of cloth of Rennes.  
Your head sheet shall be of pery pight,  
With diamonds set and rubies bright.  
When you are laid in bed so soft,  
A cage of gold shall hang aloft,  
With long paper fair burning,  
And cloves that be sweet smelling.  
Frankincense and olibanum,  
That when ye sleep the taste may come ;  
And if ye no rest can take,  
All night minstrels for you shall wake.”<sup>1</sup>

Amid such fancies and splendours the poets delight  
and lose themselves ; and the woof, like the embroideries  
of their canvas, bears the mark of this love of deco-

<sup>1</sup> Warton, i. 176, spelling modernised.

ration. They weave it out of adventures, of extraordinary and surprising events. Now it is the life of King Horn, who, thrown into a boat when a lad, is wrecked upon the coast of England, and, becoming a knight, reconquers the kingdom of his father. Now it is the history of Sir Guy, who rescues enchanted knights, cuts down the giant Colbrand, challenges and kills the Sultan in his tent. It is not for me to recount these poems, which are not English, but only translations; still, here as in France, there are many of them; they fill the imagination of the young society, and they grow in exaggeration, until, falling to the lowest depth of insipidity and improbability, they are buried for ever by Cervantes. What would people say of a society which had no literature but the opera with its unrealities? Yet it was a literature of this kind which formed the intellectual food of the middle ages. People then did not ask for truth, but entertainment, and that vehement and hollow, full of glare and startling events. They asked for impossible voyages, extravagant challenges, a racket of contests, a confusion of magnificence and entanglement of chances. For introspective history they had no liking, cared nothing for the adventures of the heart, devoted their attention to the outside. They remained children to the last, with eyes glued to a series of exaggerated and coloured images, and, for lack of thinking, did not perceive that they had learnt nothing.

What was there beneath this fanciful dream? Brutal and evil human passions, unchained at first by religious fury, then delivered up to their own devices, and, beneath a show of external courtesy, as vile as ever. Look at the popular king, Richard Cœur de Lion, and reckon up his butcheries and murders: "**King Richard,**"



says a poem, "is the best king ever mentioned in song."<sup>1</sup> I have no objection; but if he has the heart of a lion, he has also that brute's appetite. One day, under the walls of Acre, being convalescent, he had a great desire for some pork. There was no pork. They killed a young Saracen, fresh and tender, cooked and salted him, and the king ate him and found him very good; whereupon he desired to see the head of the pig. The cook brought it in trembling. The king falls a laughing, and says the army has nothing to fear from famine, having provisions ready at hand. He takes the town, and presently Saladin's ambassadors come to sue for pardon for the prisoners. Richard has thirty of the most noble beheaded, and bids his cook boil the heads, and serve one to each ambassador, with a ticket bearing the name and family of the dead man. Meanwhile, in their presence, he eats his own with a relish, bids them tell Saladin how the Christians make war, and ask him if it is true that they fear him. Then he orders the sixty thousand prisoners to be led into the plain:

"They were led into the place full even.  
There they heard angels of heaven;  
They said: "Seigneures, tuez, tuez!  
Spare hem nought, and beheadeth these!"  
King Richard heard the angels' voice,  
And thanked God and the holy cross."

Thereupon they behead them all. When he took a town, it was his wont to murder every one, even children and women. Such was the devotion of the middle ages, not only in romances, as here, but in history. At the

<sup>1</sup> Warton, i. 123:

"In Fraunce these rhymes were wroght,  
Every Englyshe ne knew it not."

taking of Jerusalem the whole population, seventy thousand persons, were massacred.

Thus even in chivalrous stories the fierce and unbridled instincts of the bloodthirsty brute break out. The authentic narratives show it. Henry II. irritated at a page, attempted to tear out his eyes.<sup>1</sup> John Lackland let twenty-three hostages die in prison of hunger. Edward II. caused at one time twenty-eight nobles to be hanged and disembowelled, and was himself put to death by the insertion of a red-hot iron into his bowels. Look in Froissart for the debaucheries and murders in France as well as in England, of the Hundred Years' War, and then for the slaughters of the Wars of the Roses. In both countries feudal independence ended in civil war, and the middle age founders under its vices. Chivalrous courtesy, which cloaked the native ferocity, disappears like some hangings suddenly consumed by the breaking out of a fire; at that time in England they killed nobles in preference, and prisoners too, even children, with insults, in cold blood. What, then, did man learn in this civilisation and by this literature? How was he humanised? What precepts of justice, habits of reflection, store of true judgments, did this culture interpose between his desires and his actions, in order to moderate his passion? He dreamed, he imagined a sort of elegant ceremonial in order the better to address lords and ladies; he discovered the gallant code of little Jehan de Saintré. But where is the true education? Wherein has Froissart profited by all his vast experience? He was a fine specimen of a babbling child; what they called his poesy, the *poésie neuve*, is only a refined gabble, a senile puerility. Some rhetor-

<sup>1</sup> See Lingard's *History*, ii. 55, note 4.—TR.

ricians, like Christine de Pisan, try to round their periods after an ancient model ; but all their literature amounts to nothing. No one can think. Sir John Maundeville, who travelled all over the world a hundred and fifty years after Villehardouin, is as contracted in his ideas as Villehardouin himself. Extraordinary legends and fables, every sort of credulity and ignorance, abound in his book. When he wishes to explain why Palestine has passed into the hands of various possessors instead of continuing under one government, he says that it is because God would not that it should continue longer in the hands of traitors and sinners, whether Christians or others. He has seen at Jerusalem, on the steps of the temple, the footmarks of the ass which our lord rode on Palm Sunday. He describes the Ethiopians as a people who have only one foot, but so large that they can make use of it as a parasol. He instances one island "where be people as big as gyants, of 28 feet long, and have no cloathing but beasts' skins ;" then another island, "where there are many evil and foul women, but have precious stones in their eyes, and have such force that if they behold any man with wrath, they slay him with beholding, as the basilisk doth." The good man relates ; that is all : doubt and common sense scarcely exist in the world he lives in. He has neither judgment nor reflection ; he piles facts one on top of another, with no further connection ; his book is simply a mirror which reproduces recollections of his eyes and ears. "And all those who will say a Pater and an Ave Maria in my behalf, I give them an interest and a share in all the holy pilgrimages I ever made in my life." That is his farewell, and accords with all the rest. Neither public morality nor public knowledge

has gained anything from these three centuries of culture. This French culture, copied in vain throughout Europe, has but superficially adorned mankind, and the varnish with which it decked them, is already tarnished everywhere or scales off. It was worse in England, where the thing was more superficial and the application worse than in France, where foreign hands laid it on, and where it could only half cover the Saxon crust, where that crust was worn away and rough. That is the reason why, during three centuries, throughout the whole first feudal age, the literature of the Normans in England, made up of imitations, translations, and clumsy copies, ends in nothing.

## VI.

Meantime, what has become of the conquered people? Has the old stock, on which the brilliant continental flowers were grafted, engendered no literary shoot of its own? Did it continue barren during all this time under the Norman axe, which stripped it of all its buds? It grew very feebly, but it grew nevertheless. The subjugated race is not a dismembered nation, dislocated, uprooted, sluggish, like the populations of the Continent, which, after the long Roman oppression, were given up to the unrestrained invasion of barbarians; it increased, remained fixed in its own soil, full of sap: its members were not displaced; it was simply lopped in order to receive on its crown a cluster of foreign branches. True, it had suffered, but at last the wound closed, the saps mingled. Even the hard, stiff ligatures with which the Conqueror bound it, henceforth contributed to its fixity and vigour. The land was mapped out; every title veri-

fied, defined in writing;<sup>1</sup> every right or tenure valued; every man registered as to his locality, and also his condition, duties, descent, and resources, so that the whole nation was enveloped in a network of which not a mesh would break. Its future development had to be within these limits. Its constitution was settled, and in this positive and stringent enclosure men were compelled to unfold themselves and to act. Solidarity and strife; these were the two effects of the great and orderly establishment which shaped and held together, on one side the aristocracy of the conquerors, on the other the conquered people; even as in Rome the systematic fusing of conquered peoples into the plebs, and the constrained organisation of the patricians in contrast with the plebs, enrolled the private individuals in two orders, whose opposition and union formed the state. Thus, here as in Rome, the national character was moulded and completed by the habit of corporate action, the respect for written law, political and practical aptitude, the development of combative and patient energy. It was the Domesday Book which, binding this young society in a rigid discipline, made of the Saxon the Englishman of our own day.

Gradually and slowly, amidst the gloomy complainings of the chroniclers, we find the new man fashioned by action, like a child who cries because steel stays, though they improve his figure, give him pain. However reduced and downtrodden the Saxons were, they did not

<sup>1</sup> Domesday Book. Froude's *Hist. of England*, 1858, i. 13: "Through all these arrangements a single aim is visible, that every man in England should have his definite place and definite duty assigned to him, and that no human being should be at liberty to lead at his own pleasure an unaccountable existence. The discipline of an army was transferred to the details of social life."

all sink into the populace. Some,<sup>1</sup> almost in every county, remained lords of their estates, on the condition of doing homage for them to the king. Many became vassals of Norman barons, and remained proprietors on this condition. A greater number became socagers, that is, free proprietors, burdened with a tax, but possessed of the right of alienating their property; and the Saxon villeins found patrons in these, as the plebs formerly did in the Italian nobles who were transplanted to Rome. The patronage of the Saxons who preserved their integral position was effective, for they were not isolated: marriages from the first united the two races, as it had the patricians and plebeians of Rome;<sup>2</sup> a Norman brother-in-law to a Saxon, defended himself in defending him. In those turbulent times, and in an armed community, relatives and allies were obliged to stand shoulder to shoulder in order to keep their ground. After all, it was necessary for the new-comers to consider their subjects, for these subjects had the heart and courage of men: the Saxons, like the plebeians at Rome, remembered their native rank and their original independence. We can recognise it in the complaints and indignation of the chroniclers, in the growling and menaces of popular revolt, in the long bitterness with which they continually recalled their ancient liberty, in

<sup>1</sup> Domesday Book, "tenants-in-chief."

<sup>2</sup> According to Ailred (tamp. Hen. II.), "a king, many bishops and abbots, many great earls and noble knights descended both from English and Norman blood, constituted a support to the one and an honour to the other." "At present," says another author of the same period, "as the English and Normans dwell together, and have constantly intermarried, the two nations are so completely mingled together, that at least as regards freemen, one can scarcely distinguish who is Norman and who English. . . . The villeins attached to the soil," he says again, "are alone of pure Saxon blood."

the favour with which they cherished the daring and rebellion of outlaws. There were Saxon families at the end of the twelfth century, who had bound themselves by a perpetual vow, to wear long beards from father to son in memory of the national custom and of the old country. Such men, even though fallen to the condition of socagers, even sunk into villeins, had a stiffer neck than the wretched colonists of the Continent, trodden down and moulded by four centuries of Roman taxation. By their feelings as well as by their condition, they were the broken remains, but also the living elements, of a free people. They did not suffer the extremities of oppression. They constituted the body of the nation, the laborious, courageous body which supplied its energy. The great barons felt that they must rely upon them in their resistance to the king. Very soon, in stipulating for themselves, they stipulated for all freemen,<sup>1</sup> even for merchants and villeins. Thereafter "No merchant shall be dispossessed of his merchandise, no villein of the instruments of his labour; no freeman, merchant, or villein shall be taxed unreasonably for a small crime; no freeman shall be arrested, or imprisoned, or disseised of his land, or outlawed, or destroyed in any manner, but by the lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land." Thus protected they raise themselves and act. In each county there was a court, where all freeholders, small or great, came to deliberate about the municipal affairs, administer justice, and appoint tax-assessors. The red-bearded Saxon, with his clear complexion and great white teeth, came and sat by the Norman's side; these were franklins like the one whom Chaucer describes:

<sup>1</sup> *Magna Charta*, 1215.

" A Frankelain was in this compaignie ;  
 White was his berd, as is the dayesie.  
 Of his complexion he was sanguin,  
 Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in win.  
 To liven in delit was ever his wone,  
 For he was Epicures owen sone,  
 That held opinion that plain delit  
 Was verally felicite parfite.  
 An housholder, and that a grete was he,  
 Seint Julian he was in his contree.  
 His brede, his ale, was alway after on ;  
 A better envyned man was no wher non.  
 Withouten bake mete never was his hous,  
 Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous,  
 It snewed in his hous of mete and drinke,  
 Of all deintees that men coud of thinkes ;  
 After the sondry secons of the yere,  
 So changed he his mete and his soupera.  
 Ful many a fat partrich had he in mewe,  
 And many a brema, and many a luce in stewa.  
 Wo was his coke but if his sauce were  
 Poinant and sharpe, and redy all his gere.  
 His table, dormant in his halle alway  
 Stode redy covered alle the longe day.  
 At sessions ther was he lord and sire.  
 Ful often time he was knight of the shire.  
 An anelace and a gipciere all of silk,  
 Heng at his girdle, white as morwe milk.  
 A shereve hadde he ben, and a contour.  
 Was no wher swiche a worthy vavasour." <sup>1</sup>

With him occasionally in the assembly, oftenest  
 among the audience, were the yeomen, farmers, foresters,  
 tradesmen, his fellow-countrymen, muscular and resolute

<sup>1</sup> *Chaucer's Works*, ed. Sir H. Nicholas, 6 vols., 1845, *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 11, l. 333.



men, not slow in the defence of their property, and in supporting him who would take their cause in hand, with voice, fist, and weapons. Is it likely that the discontent of such men to whom the following description applies could be overlooked?

“ The Miller was a stout carl for the nones,  
Ful bigge he was of braun and eke of bones;  
That proved wel, for over all ther he came,  
At wrestling he wold bere away the ram.  
He was short shuldered brode, a thikke gnarre,  
Ther n’as no dore, that he n’olde heve of barre,  
Or breke it at a renning with his hede.  
His berd as any sowe or fox was rede,  
And therto brode, as though it were a spade.  
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade  
A wert, and thereon stode a tufte of heres,  
Rede as the bristles of a sowes eres :  
His nose-thirles blacke were and wida.  
A sward and bokeler bare he by his side.  
His mouth as wide was as a forneis,  
He was a jangler and a goliardeis,  
And that was most of sinne, and harlotries.  
Wel coude he stelen corne and tollen thries.  
And yet he had a thomb of gold parde.  
A white cote and a blew hode wered he.  
A baggepipe wel coude he blowe and sounne,  
And therewithall he brought us out of tounne.”<sup>1</sup>

Those are the athletic forms, the square build, the jolly John Bulls of the period, such as we yet find them, nourished by meat and porter, sustained by bodily exercise and boxing. These are the men we must keep before us, if we will understand how political liberty

<sup>1</sup> *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 17, l. 547.

has been established in this country. Gradually they find the simple knights, their colleagues in the county court, too poor to be present with the great barons at the royal assemblies, coalescing with them. They become united by community of interests, by similarity of manners, by nearness of condition; they take them for their representatives, they elect them.<sup>1</sup> They have now entered upon public life, and the advent of a new reinforcement, gives them a perpetual standing in their changed condition. The towns laid waste by the Conquest are gradually repopled. They obtain or exact charters; the townsmen buy themselves out of the arbitrary taxes that were imposed on them; they get possession of the land on which their houses are built; they unite themselves under mayors and aldermen. Each town now, within the meshes of the great feudal net, is a power. The Earl of Leicester, rebelling against the king, summons two burgesses from each town to Parliament,<sup>2</sup> to authorise and support him. From that time the conquered race, both in country and town, rose to political life. If they were taxed, it was with their consent; they paid nothing which they did not agree to. Early in the fourteenth century their united deputies composed the House of Commons; and already, at the close of the preceding century, the Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking in the name of the king, said to the pope, "It is the custom of the kingdom of England, that in all affairs relating to the state of this kingdom, the advice of all who are interested in them should be taken."

<sup>1</sup> From 1214, and also in 1225 and 1254. Guizot, *Origin of the Representative System in England*, pp. 297-299.

<sup>2</sup> In 1264.

## VII.

If they have acquired liberties, it is because they have obtained them by force; circumstances have assisted, but character has done more. The protection of the great barons and the alliance of the plain knights have strengthened them; but it was by their native roughness and energy that they maintained their independence. Look at the contrast they offer at this moment to their neighbours. What occupies the mind of the French people? The fabliaux, the naughty tricks of Reynard, the art of deceiving Master Isengrin, of stealing his wife, of cheating him out of his dinner, of getting him beaten by a third party without danger to one's self; in short, the triumph of poverty and cleverness over power united to folly. The popular hero is already the artful plebeian, chaffing, light-hearted, who, later on, will ripen into Panurge and Figaro, not apt to withstand you to your face, too sharp to care for great victories and habits of strife, inclined by the nimbleness of his wit to dodge round an obstacle; if he but touch a man with the tip of his finger, that man tumbles into the trap. But here we have other customs: it is Robin Hood, a valiant outlaw, living free and bold in the green forest, waging frank and open war against sheriff and law.<sup>1</sup> If ever a man was popular in his country, it was he. "It is he," says an old historian, "whom the common people love so dearly to celebrate in games and comedies, and whose history, sung by fiddlers, interests them more than any other." In the sixteenth century he still had his commemoration day, observed by all the people in the small towns and in the country. Bishop Latimer, making his pastoral tour, announced

<sup>1</sup> Aug. Thierry, iv. 56. Ritson's *Robin Hood*, 1832.

one day that he would preach in a certain place. On the morrow, proceeding to the church, he found the doors closed, and waited more than an hour before they brought him the key. At last a man came and said to him, "Syr, thys ys a busye day with us; we cannot heare you: it is Robyn Hoodes Daye. The parishe are gone abrode to gather for Robyn Hood. . . . I was fayne there to geve place to Robyn Hooda."<sup>1</sup> The bishop was obliged to divest himself of his ecclesiastical garments and proceed on his journey, leaving his place to archers dressed in green, who played on a rustic stage the parts of Robin Hood, Little John, and their band. In fact, he was the national hero. Saxon in the first place, and waging war against the men of law, against bishops and archbishops, whose sway was so heavy; generous, moreover, giving to a poor ruined knight clothes, horse, and money to buy back the land he had pledged to a rapacious abbot; compassionate too, and kind to the poor, enjoining his men not to injure yeomen and labourers; but above all rash, bold, proud, who would go and draw his bow before the sheriff's eyes and to his face; ready with blows, whether to give or take. He slew fourteen out of fifteen foresters who came to arrest him; he slays the sheriff, the judge, the town gatekeeper; he is ready to slay as many more as like to come; and all this joyously, jovially, like an honest fellow who eats well, has a hard skin, lives in the open air, and revels in animal life.

"In somer when the shawes be sheyne,  
And lewes be large and long,  
Hit is fulle mery in feyre foreste  
To here the foulis song."

<sup>1</sup> Latimer's *Sermons*, ed. Arber, 6th Sermon, 1869, p. 178.

That is how many ballads begin ; and the fine weather, which makes the stags and oxen butt with their horns, inspires them with the thought of exchanging blows with sword or stick. Robin dreamed that two yeomen were thrashing him, and he wants to go and find them, angrily repelling Little John, who offers to go first :

“ Ah John, by me thou settest noe store,  
And that I farley finde :  
How oft send I my men before,  
And tarry myselfe behinde !

“ It is no cunnin a knave to ken,  
An a man but heare him speake ;  
An it were not for bursting of my bowe,  
John, I thy head wold breake.”<sup>1</sup> . . .

He goes alone, and meets the robust yeoman, Guy of Gisborne :

“ He that had neyther beene kythe nor kin,  
Might have seen a full fayre fight,  
To see how together these yeomen went  
With blades both browne and bright,

“ To see how these yeomen together they fought  
Two howres of a summer’s day ;  
Yett neither Robin Hood nor sir Guy  
Them fettilled to flye away.”<sup>2</sup>

You see Guy the yeoman is as brave as Robin Hood ; he came to seek him in the wood, and drew the bow almost as well as he. This old popular poetry is not the praise of a single bandit, but of an entire class, the yeomanry. “ God haffe mersey on Robin Hodys solle,

<sup>1</sup> Ritson, *Robin Hood Ballads*, l. iv. v. 41-42.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 145-152.

and saffe all god yemanry." That is how many ballads end. The brave yeoman, inured to blows, a good archer, clever at sword and stick, is the favourite. There were also redoubtable, armed townsfolk, accustomed to make use of their arms. Here they are at work :

" ' O that were a shame,' said jolly Robin,  
    ' We being three, and thou but one,'  
The pinder<sup>1</sup> leapt back then thirty good foot,  
    'Twas thirty good foot and one.

" He leaned his back fast unto a thorn,  
    And his foot against a stone,  
And there he fought a long summer's day,  
    A summer's day so long.

" Till that their swords on their broad bucklers  
    Were broke fast into their hands." <sup>2</sup>

Often even Robin does not get the advantage :

" ' I pass not for length," bold Arthur reply'd,  
    ' My staff is of oke so free ;  
Eight foot and a half, it will knock down a calf,  
    And I hope it will knock down thee.'

" Then Robin could no longer forbear,  
    He gave him such a knock,  
Quickly and soon the blood came down  
    Before it was ten a clock.

" Then Arthur he soon recovered himself,  
    And gave him such a knock on the crown,  
That from every side of bold Robin Hood's head  
    The blood came trickling down.

<sup>1</sup> A pinder's task was to pin the sheep in the fold, cattle in the penfold or pound (Richardson).—Tn.

<sup>2</sup> Ritson, ii. 2, v. 17-26.

“ Then Robin raged like a wild boar,  
As soon as he saw his own blood :  
Then Bland was in hast, he laid on so fast,  
As though he had been cleaving of wood.

“ And about and about and about they went,  
Like two wild bores in a chase,  
Striving to aim each other to maim,  
Leg, arm, or any other place.

“ And knock for knock they lustily dealt,  
Which held for two hours and more,  
Till all the wood rang at every bang,  
They ply'd their work so sore.

“ ‘ Hold thy hand, hold thy hand,’ said Robin Hood,  
And let thy quarrel fall ;  
For here we may thrash our bones all to mesh,  
And get no coyn at all.

“ ‘ And in the forrest of merry Sherwood,  
Hereafter thou shalt be free.’  
‘ God a mercy for nought, my freedom I bought,  
I may thank my staff, and not thee.’ ” <sup>1</sup> . .

“ Who are you, then ? ” says Robin :

“ ‘ I am a tanner,’ bold Arthur reply’d,  
‘ In Nottingham long I have wrought ;  
And if thou’lt come there, I vow and swear,  
I will tan thy hide for nought.’ ”

“ ‘ God a mercy, good fellow,’ said jolly Robin,  
‘ Since thou art so kind and free ;  
And if thou wilt tan my hide for nought,  
I will do as much for thee.’ ” <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ritson, ii. 6, v. 58-59.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 94-101.

With these generous offers, they embrace ; a free exchange of honest blows always prepares the way for friendship. It was so Robin Hood tried Little John, whom he loved all his life after. Little John was seven feet high, and being on a bridge, would not give way. Honest Robin would not use his bow against him, but went and cut a stick seven feet long ; and they agreed amicably to fight on the bridge until one should fall into the water. They fall to so merrily that "their bones ring." In the end Robin falls, and he feels only the more respect for Little John. Another time, having a sword with him, he was thrashed by a tinker who had only a stick. Full of admiration, he gives him a hundred pounds. Again he was thrashed by a potter, who refused him toll ; then by a shepherd. They fight to wile away time. Even now-a-days boxers give each other a friendly grip before setting to ; they knock one another about in this country honourably, without malice, fury, or shame. Broken teeth, black eyes, smashed ribs, do not call for murderous vengeance : it would seem that the bones are more solid and the nerves less sensitive in England than elsewhere. Blows once exchanged, they take each other by the hand, and dance together on the green grass ;

"Then Robin took them both by the hands,  
And danc'd round about the oke tree.  
'For three merry men, and three merry men,  
And three merry men we be.'"

Moreover, these people, in each parish, practised the bow every Sunday, and were the best archers in the world ; from the close of the fourteenth century the general emancipation of the villeins multiplied



their number greatly, and you can now understand how, amidst all the operations and changes of the great central powers, the liberty of the subject survived. After all, the only permanent and unalterable guarantee, in every country and under every constitution, is this unspoken declaration in the heart of the mass of the people, which is well understood on all sides: "If any man touches my property, enters my house, obstructs or molests me, let him beware. I have patience, but I have also strong arms, good comrades, a good blade, and, on occasion, a firm resolve, happen what may, to plunge my blade up to its hilt in his throat."

## VIII.

Thus thought Sir John Fortescue, Chancellor of England under Henry VI., exiled in France during the Wars of the Roses, one of the oldest prose-writers, and the first who weighed and explained the constitution of his country.<sup>1</sup> He says:

"It is cowardise and lack of hartes and corage that kepeth the Frenchmen from rysyng, and not povertye;<sup>2</sup> which corage no Frenche man hath like to the English man. It hath ben often seen in Englonde that iij or iv thefes, for povertie, hath sett upon vij or viij true men, and robbyd them al. But it hath not ben seen in Fraunce, that vij or viij thefes have ben hardy to robbe iij or iv true men. Wherefor it is right seld that Frenchmen be hangyd for robberye, for that they have no bertys to do so terryble an acte. There be therfor mo men

<sup>1</sup> *The Difference between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy—A learned Commendation of the Politic Laws of England* (Latin). I frequently quote from the second work, which is more full and complete.

<sup>2</sup> The courage which finds utterance here is coarse; the English instincts are combative and independent. The French race, and the Gauls generally, are perhaps the most reckless of life of any.

hangyd in England, in a yere, for robberye and manslaughter, than ther be hangid in Fraunce for such cause of crime in vij yera."<sup>1</sup>

This throws a startling and terrible light on the violent condition of this armed community, where sudden attacks are an everyday matter, and every one, rich and poor, lives with his hand on his sword. There were great bands of malefactors under Edward I., who infested the country, and fought with those who came to seize them. The inhabitants of the towns were obliged to gather together with those of the neighbouring towns, with hue and cry, to pursue and capture them. Under Edward III. there were barons who rode about with armed escorts and archers, seizing the manors, carrying off ladies and girls of high degree, mutilating, killing, extorting ransoms from people in their own houses, as if they were in an enemy's land, and sometimes coming before the judges at the sessions in such guise and in so great force that the judges were afraid and dared not administer justice.<sup>2</sup> Read the letters of the Paston family, under Henry VI. and Edward IV., and you will see how private war was at every door, how it was necessary for a man to provide himself with men and arms, to be on the alert for defence of his property, to be self-reliant, to depend on his own strength and courage. It is this excess of vigour and readiness to fight which, after their victories in France, set them against one another in England, in the butcheries of the Wars of

<sup>1</sup> *The Difference*, etc., 8d ed. 1724, ch. xiii. p. 98. There are now-a-days in France 42 highway robberies as against 738 in England. In 1843, there were in England four times as many accusations of crimes and offences as in France, having regard to the number of inhabitants (*Morceaux de Jonville*).

<sup>2</sup> Statute of Winchester, 1285; Ordinance of 1378.

the Roses. The strangers who saw them were astonished at their bodily strength and courage, at the great pieces of beef "which feed their muscles, at their military habits, their fierce obstinacy, as of savage beasts."<sup>1</sup> They are like their bulldogs, an untameable race, who in their mad courage "cast themselves with shut eyes into the den of a Russian bear, and get their head broken like a rotten apple." This strange condition of a militant community, so full of danger, and requiring so much effort, does not make them afraid. King Edward having given orders to send disturbers of the peace to prison without legal proceedings, and not to liberate them, on bail or otherwise, the Commons declared the order "horribly vexatious;" resist it, refuse to be too much protected. Less peace, but more independence. They maintain the guarantees of the subject at the expense of public security, and prefer turbulent liberty to arbitrary order. Better suffer marauders whom they could fight, than magistrates under whom they would have to bend.

This proud and persistent notion gives rise to, and fashions Fortescue's whole work :

" Ther be two kynds of kyngdomys, of the which that one ys a lordship callid in Latyne *Dominium regale*, and that other is callid *Dominium politicum et regale*."

The first is established in France, and the second in England.

" And they dyversen in that the first may rule his people by such lawys as he makyth hymself, and therefor, he may set upon them talys, and other impositions, such as he wyl hymself, with-

<sup>1</sup> Benvenuto Cellini, quoted by Froude, i. 20, *Hist. of England*. Shakespeare, *Henry V.* : conversation of French lords before the battle of Agincourt.

out their assent. The second may not rule his people by other laws than such as they assent unto ; and therfor he may set upon them non impositions without their own assent.”<sup>1</sup>

In a state like this, the will of the people is the prime element of life. Sir John Fortescue says further :

“ A king of England cannot at his pleasure make any alterations in the laws of the land, for the nature of his government is not only regal, but political.”

“ In the body politic, the first thing which lives and moves is the intention of the people, having in it the blood, that is, the prudential care and provision for the public good, which it transmits and communicates to the head, as to the principal part, and to all the rest of the members of the said body politic, whereby it subsists and is invigorated. The law under which the people is incorporated may be compared to the nerves or sinews of the body natural. . . . And as the bones and all the other members of the body preserve their functions and discharge their several offices by the nerves, so do the members of the community by the law. And as the head of the body natural cannot change its nerves or sinews, cannot deny to the several parts their proper energy, their due proportion and aliment of blood, neither can a king who is the head of the body politic change the laws thereof, nor take from the people what is theirs by right, against their consents. . . . For he is appointed to protect his subjects in their lives, properties, and laws, for this very end and purpose he has the delegation of power from the people.”

Here we have all the ideas of Locke in the fifteenth century ; so powerful is practice to suggest theory ! so quickly does man discover, in the enjoyment of liberty, the nature of liberty ! Fortescue goes further ; he contrasts, step by step, the Roman law, that inheritance of all

<sup>1</sup> *The Difference, etc.*, p. i.

Latin peoples, with the English law, that heritage of all Teutonic peoples : one the work of absolute princes, and tending altogether to the sacrifice of the individual ; the other the work of the common will, tending altogether to protect the person. He contrasts the maxims of the imperial jurisconsults, who accord "force of law to all which is determined by the prince," with the statutes of England, which "are not enacted by the sole will of the prince, . . . but with the concurrent consent of the whole kingdom, by their representatives in Parliament, . . . more than three hundred select persons." He contrasts the arbitrary nomination of imperial officers with the election of the sheriff, and says :

" There is in every county a certain officer, called the king's sheriff, who, amongst other duties of his office, executes within his county all mandates and judgments of the king's courts of justice : he is an annual officer ; and it is not lawful for him, after the expiration of his year, to continue to act in his said office, neither shall he be taken in again to execute the said office within two years thence next ensuing. The manner of his election is thus : Every year, on the morrow of All-Souls, there meet in the King's Court of Exchequer all the king's counsellors, as well lords spiritual and temporal, as all other the king's justices, all the barons of the Exchequer, the Master of the Rolls, and certain other officers, when all of them, by common consent, nominate three of every county knights or esquires, persons of distinction, and such as they esteem fittest qualified to bear the office of sheriff of that county for the year ensuing. The king only makes choice of one out of the three so nominated and returned, who, in virtue of the king's letters patent, is constituted High Sheriff of that county."

He contrasts the Roman procedure, which is satisfied

with two witnesses to condemn a man, with the jury, the three permitted challenges, the admirable guarantees of justice with which the uprightness, number, repute, and condition of the juries surround the sentence. About the juries he says :

“ Twelve good and true men being sworn, as in the manner above related, legally qualified, that is, having, over and besides their moveables, possessions in land sufficient, as was said, wherewith to maintain their rank and station ; neither inspected by, nor at variance with either of the parties ; all of the neighbourhood ; there shall be read to them, in English, by the Court, the record and nature of the plea.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus protected, the English commons cannot be other than flourishing. Consider, on the other hand, he says to the young prince whom he is instructing, the condition of the commons in France. By their taxes, tax on salt, on wine, billeting of soldiers, they are reduced to great misery. You have seen them on your travels. . . .

“ The same Commons be so impoverishid and distroyyd, that they may unneth lyve. Thay drink water, thay eate apples, with bred right brown made of rye. They eate no fleshe, but if it be selden, a litill larde, or of the entrails or heds of bests aclaayne for the nobles and merchants of the land. They weryn no wollyn, but if it be a pore cote under their uttermost garment, made of grete canvaas, and cal it a frok. Their hosyn be of like canvas, and passen not their knee, wherfor they be gartrid and their thyghs bare. Their wifs and children gone hare fote.

<sup>1</sup> The original of this very famous treatise, *de Laudibus Legum Angliæ*, was written in Latin between 1464 and 1470, first published in 1537, and translated into English in 1775 by Francis Gregor. I have taken these extracts from the magnificent edition of Sir John Fortescue's works published in 1869 for private distribution, and edited by Thomas Fortescue, Lord Clermont. Some of the pieces quoted, left in the old spelling, are taken from an older edition, translated by Robert Mulcaster in 1567.—Tn.

. . . For sum of them, that was wonte to pay to his lord for his tenement which he hyrith by the year a scute payth now to the kyng, over that scute, fyve skuta. Wher through they be artyd by necessite so to watch, labour and grub in the ground for their sustenance, that their nature is much wasted, and the kynd of them brought to nowght. Thay gone crokyd and ar feeble, not able to fight nor to defend the realm ; nor they have wepon, nor monye to buy them wepon withal . . . This is the frute first of hyre Jus regale. . . . But blessed be God, this land ys rulid under a better lawe, and therfor the people therof be not in such penurye, nor therby hurt in their persons, but they be wealthie and have all things necessarie to the sustenance of nature. Wherefore they be myghty and able to resyste the adversaries of the realms that do or will do them wrong. Loo, this is the frut of Jus politicum et regale, under which we lyve."<sup>1</sup> "Every inhabiter of the realme of England useth and enjoyeth at his pleasure all the frutes that his land or cattel beareth, with al the profits and commodities which by his owne travayle, or by the labour of others, hae gaineth ; not hindered by the iniurie or wrong detainement of anye man, but that hee shall bee allowed a reasonable recompence."<sup>2</sup> . . . Hereby it commeth to passe that the men of that lande are riche, havynge aboundaunce of golde and silver, and other thinges necessarie for the main-tenaunce of man's life. They drinke no water, unless it be so, that some for devotion, and uppon a zeale of penaunce, doe abstaine from other drinks. They eate plentifully of all kindes of fleshe and fishe. They weare fine woollen cloth in all their apparel ; they have also aboundaunce of bed-coveringes in their houses, and of all other woollen stuffe. They have greate store of all hustlementes and implementes of householde, they are plentifully furnished with al instruments of husbandry, and all other things that are requisite to the accomplishment of a quiet and wealthy lyfe, according to their estates and degrees. Neither

<sup>1</sup> *Of an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, 3d ed., 1724, ch. iii. p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Commynes bears the same testimony.

are they sued in the lawe, but onely before ordinary iudges, where by the lawes of the lande they are iustly intreated. Neither are they arrested or impleaded for their moveables or possessions, or arraigned of any offence, bee it never so great and outrageous, but after the lawes of the land, and before the iudges aforesaid."<sup>1</sup>

All this arises from the constitution of the country and the distribution of the land. Whilst in other countries we find only a population of paupers, with here and there a few lords, England is covered and filled with owners of lands and fields; so that "therein so small a thorpe cannot bee founde, wherein dwelleth not a knight, an esquire, or suche a housholder as is there commonly called a franklayne, enryched with greate possessions. And also other freeholders, and many yeomen able for their livelodes to make a jurye in fourme afore-mentioned. For there bee in that lande divers yeomen, which are able to dispend by the yeare above a hundred poundes."<sup>2</sup> Harrison says:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *De Laudibus*, etc., ch. xxxvi.

<sup>2</sup> "The might of the realme most stondyth upon archers which be not rich men." Compare Hallam, ii. 482. All this takes us back as far as the Conquest, and farther. "It is reasonable to suppose that the greater part of those who appear to have possessed small freeholds or parcels of manors were no other than the original nation. . . . A respectable class of free socagers, having in general full right of alienating their lands, and holding them probably at a small certain rent from the lord of the manor, frequently occurs in the Domesday Book." At all events, there were in Domesday Book Saxons "perfectly exempt from villenage." This class is mentioned with respect in the treatises of Glanvil and Bracton. As for the villeins, they were quickly liberated in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, either by their own energies or by becoming copyholders. The Wars of the Roses still further raised the commons; orders were frequently issued, previous to a battle, to slay the nobles and spare the commoners.

<sup>3</sup> *Description of England*, 275.



"This sort of people, have more estimation than labourers and the common sort of artificers, and these commonlie live wealtheilie, keepe good houses, and travell to get riches. They are for the most part farmers to gentlemen," and keep servants of their own. "These were they that in times past made all France afraid. And albeit they be not called master, as gentlemen are, or sir, as to knights apperteineth, but onelie John and Thomas, etc., yet have they beene found to have done verie good service; and the kings of England, in foughten battels, were wont to remaine among them (who were their footmen) as the French kings did among their horssemen: the prince thereby showing where his chiefe strength did consist."

Such men, says Fortescue, might form a legal jury, and vote, resist, be associated, do everything wherein a free government consists: for they were numerous in every district; they were not down-trodden like the timid peasants of France; they had their honour and that of their family to maintain; "they be well provided with arms; they remember that they have won battles in France."<sup>1</sup> Such is the class, still obscure, but more

<sup>1</sup> The following is a portrait of a yeoman, by Latimer, in the first sermon preached before Edward VI., 8th March 1549: "My father was a yeoman, and had no lands of his own; only he had a farm of £3 or £4 by year at the uttermost, and hereupon he tilled so much as kept half-a-dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able, and did find the king a harness, with himself and his horse; while he came to the place that he should receive the king's wages. I can remember that I buckled his harness when he went unto Blackheath field. He kept me to school, or else I had not been able to have preached before the King's Majesty now. He married my sisters with £5 or 20 nobles a-piece, so that he brought them up in godliness and fear of God; he kept hospitality for his poor neighbours, and some alms he gave to the poor; and all this did he of the said farm. Where he that now hath it payeth £16 by the year, or more, and is not able to do anything for his prince, for himself, nor for his children, or give a cup of drink to the poor."

This is from the sixth sermon, preached before the young king, 12th

rich and powerful every century, which, founded by the down-trodden Saxon aristocracy, and sustained by the surviving Saxon character, ended, under the lead of the inferior Norman nobility, and under the patronage of the superior Norman nobility, in establishing and settling a free constitution, and a nation worthy of liberty.

### IX.

When, as here, men are endowed with a serious character, have a resolute spirit, and possess independent habits, they deal with their conscience as with their daily business, and end by laying hands on church as well as state. Already for a long time the exactions of the Roman See had provoked the resistance of the people,<sup>1</sup> and the higher clergy became unpopular. Men complained that the best livings were given by the Pope to non-resident strangers; that some Italian, unknown in England, possessed fifty or sixty benefices in England; that English money poured into Rome; and that the clergy, being judged only by clergy, gave themselves up to their vices, and abused their state of immunity. In the first years of Henry III.'s reign there were nearly a hundred murders committed by priests then alive. At the beginning of the fourteenth century the ecclesiastical revenue was twelve

April 1549 : "In my time my poor father was as diligent to teach me to shoot as to learn (me) any other thing ; and so, I think, other men did their children. He taught me how to draw, how to lay my body in my bow, and not to draw with strength of arms, as other nations do, but with strength of the body. I had my bows bought me according to my age and strength ; as I increased in them, so my bows were made bigger and bigger ; for men shall never shoot well except they be brought up in it. It is a goodly art, a wholesome kind of exercise, and much commended in physic."

<sup>1</sup> In 1246, 1376. Thierry, iii. 79.

times greater than the civil; about half the soil was in the hands of the clergy. At the end of the century the commons declared that the taxes paid to the church were five times greater than the taxes paid to the crown; and some years afterwards,<sup>1</sup> considering that the wealth of the clergy only served to keep them in idleness and luxury, they proposed to confiscate it for the public benefit. Already the idea of the Reformation had forced itself upon them. They remembered how in the ballads Robin Hood ordered his folk to spare the yeomen, labourers, even knights, if they are good fellows, but never to let abbots or bishops escape. The prelates were grievously oppressing the people by means of their privileges, ecclesiastical courts, and tithes; when suddenly, amid the pleasant banter or the monotonous babble of the Norman versifiers, we hear the indignant voice of a Saxon, a man of the people and a victim of oppression, thundering against them.

It is the vision of *Piers Ploughman*, written, it is supposed, by a secular priest of Oxford.<sup>2</sup> Doubtless the traces of French taste are perceptible. It could not be otherwise: the people from below can never quite prevent themselves from imitating the people above; and the most unshackled popular poets, Burns and Béranger, too often preserve an academic style. So here a fashionable machinery, the allegory of the *Roman de la Rose*, is pressed into service. We have Do-well, Covetousness, Avarice, Simony, Conscience, and a whole world of talking abstractions. But, in spite of these

<sup>1</sup> 1404-1409. The commons declared that with these revenues the king would be able to maintain 15 earls, 1500 knights, 6200 squires, and 100 hospitals: each earl receiving annually 800 marks; each knight 100 marks, and the produce of four ploughed lands; each squire 40 marks, and the produce of two ploughed lands.

<sup>2</sup> About 1362.

vain foreign phantoms, the body of the poem is national, and true to life. The old language reappears in part; the old metre altogether, no more rhymes, but barbarous alliterations; no more jesting, but a harsh gravity, a sustained invective, a grand and sombre imagination, heavy Latin texts, hammered down as by a Protestant hand. Piers Ploughman went to sleep on the Malvern hills, and there had a wonderful dream :

“Thanne gan I meten—a mervellous swevene,  
That I was in a wilderness—wiste I nevere where;  
And as I biheeld into the east,—an heigh to the sonne,  
I seigh a tour on a toft,—trieliche y-maked,  
A deep dale bynetho—a dongeon thereinne  
With depe diches and derke—and dredfulle of sighte.  
A fair feeld ful of folk—fond I ther bitwene,  
Of alle manere of men,—the meene and the riche,  
Werchyng and wandryng—as the world asketh.  
Some putten hem to the plough,—pleiden ful selde,  
In settyng and sowyng—swonken ful harde,  
And wonnen that wastours—with glotonye dystroyeth.”<sup>1</sup>

A gloomy picture of the world, like the frightful dreams which occur so often in Albert Durer and Luther. The first reformers were persuaded that the earth was given over to evil; that the devil had on it his empire and his officers; that Antichrist, seated on the throne of Rome, displayed ecclesiastical pomps to seduce souls and cast them into the fire of hell. So here Antichrist, with raised banner, enters a convent; bells are rung; monks in solemn procession go to meet him, and receive with congratulations their lord and father.<sup>2</sup> With seven

<sup>1</sup> *Piers Ploughman's Vision and Creed*, ed. T. Wright, 1856, i. p. 2, l. 21-44.

<sup>2</sup> The Archdeacon of Richmond, on his tour in 1216, came to the priory of Bridlington with ninety-seven horses, twenty-one dogs, and three falcons.

great giants, the seven deadly sins, he besieges Conscience; and the assault is led by Idleness, who brings with her an army of more than a thousand prelates: for vices reign, more hateful from being in holy places, and employed in the church of God in the devil's service:

"Ac now is Religion a rydere—a romere aboute,  
A ledere of love-dayes—and a lond-buggere,  
A prikere on a palfrey—fro manere to manere. . . .  
And but if his knave knele—that shal his coppe brynge,  
He loureth on hym, and asketh hym—who taughte hym  
curteisie."<sup>1</sup>

But this sacrilegious show has its day, and God puts His hand on men in order to warn them. By order of Conscience, Nature sends forth a host of plagues and diseases from the planets:

"Kynde Conscience tho herde,—and cam out of the planetes,  
And sente forth his forreyours—feveres and fluxes,  
Coughes and cardiacles,—crampes and tooth-aches,  
Reumes and radegundes,—and roynous scabbes,  
Biles and bocches,—and brennynges agues,  
Frenesies and foule yveles,—forageres of kynde. . . .  
There was 'Harrow! and Help!—Here cometh Kynde!  
With Deeth that is dredful—to undo us alle!  
The lord that lyved after lust—the aloud cryde. . . .  
Deeth cam dryvyng after,—and al to duste passhed  
Kynges and knyghtes,—kayzers and popes, . . .  
Manye a lovely lady—and lemmans of knyghtes,  
Swowned and swelted for sorwe of hise dyntes."<sup>2</sup>

Here is a crowd of miseries, like those which Milton has described in his vision of human life; tragico pictures

<sup>1</sup> *Piers Ploughman's Vision*, i. p. 191, l. 6217-6228.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. Last book, p. 430, l. 14,084-14,136.

and emotions, such as the reformers delight to dwell upon. There is a like speech delivered by John Knox, before the fair ladies of Mary Stuart, which tears the veil from the human corpse just as coarsely, in order to exhibit its shame. The conception of the world, proper to the people of the north, all sad and moral, shows itself already. They are never comfortable in their country; they have to strive continually against cold or rain. They cannot live there carelessly, lying under a lovely sky, in a sultry and clear atmosphere, their eyes filled with the noble beauty and happy serenity of the land. They must work to live; be attentive, exact, keep their houses wind and water tight, trudge doggedly through the mud behind their plough, light their lamps in their shops during the day. Their climate imposes endless inconvenience, and exacts endless endurance. Hence arise melancholy and the idea of duty. Man naturally thinks of life as of a battle, oftener of black death which closes this deadly show, and leads so many plumed and disorderly processions to the silence and the eternity of the grave. All this visible world is vain; there is nothing true but human virtue,—the courageous energy with which man attains to self-command, the generous energy with which he employs himself in the service of others. On this view, then, his eyes are fixed; they pierce through worldly gauds, neglect sensual joys, to attain this. By such inner thoughts and feelings the ideal model is displaced; a new source of action springs up—the idea of righteousness. What sets them against ecclesiastical pomp and insolence, is neither the envy of the poor and low, nor the anger of the oppressed, nor a revolutionary desire to experimentalise abstract truth, but conscience. They tremble lest they should not work out their salvation if

they continue in a corrupt church ; they fear the menaces of God, and dare not embark on the great journey with unsafe guides. "What is righteousness?" asked Luther anxiously, "and how shall I obtain it?" With like anxiety Piers Ploughman goes to seek Do-well, and asks each one to show him where he shall find him. "With us," say the friars. "Contra quath ich, *Septies in die cadit justus*, and ho so syngeth certys doth nat wel;" so he betakes himself to "study and writing," like Luther; the clerks at table speak much of God and of the Trinity, "and taken Bernarde to witnesse, and putteth forth presompeions . . . ac the carful mai crie and quaken atte gate, bothe a fynghred and a furst, and for defaute spille ys non so hende to have hym yn. Clerkus and knyghtes carpen of God ofte, and haveth hym mucche in hure mouthe, ac mene men in herte;" and heart, inner faith, living virtue, are what constitute true religion. This is what these dull Saxons had begun to discover. The Teutonic conscience, and English good sense too, had been aroused, as well as individual energy, the resolution to judge and to decide alone, by and for one's self. "Christ is our hede that sitteth on hie, Heddis ne ought we have no mo," says a poem, attributed to Chaucer, and which, with others, claims independence for Christian consciences.<sup>1</sup>

"We ben his membres bothe also,  
 Father he taught us call him all,  
 Maisters to call forbad he tho ;  
 Al maisters ben wickid and fals."

No other mediator between man and God. In vain the doctors state that they have authority for their words ;

<sup>1</sup> *Piers Plowman's Creed ; the Plowman's Tale*, first printed in 1550. There were three editions in one year, it was so manifestly Protestant.

there is a word of greater authority, to wit, God's. We hear it in the fourteenth century, this grand "word of God." It quitted the learned schools, the dead languages, the dusty shelves on which the clergy suffered it to sleep, covered with a confusion of commentators and Fathers.<sup>1</sup> Wiclif appeared and translated it like Luther, and in a spirit similar to Luther's. "Cristen men and wymmen, olde and yonge, shulden studie fast in the Newe Testament, for it is of ful autorite, and opyn to undirstonding of simple men, as to the poyntis that be moost nedeful to salvacioun."<sup>2</sup> Religion must be secular, in order to escape from the hands of the clergy, who monopolise it; each must hear and read for himself the word of God: he will then be sure that it has not been corrupted; he will feel it better, and more, he will understand it better; for

"ech place of holy writ, both opyn and derk, techith mekenes and charite; and therefore he that kepith mekenes and charite hath the trewe undirstondyng and perfectioun of al holi writ. . . . Therefore no simple man of wit be aferd unmesurabi to studie in the text of holy writ. . . . and no clerk be proude of the verrey undirstondyng of holy writ, for whi undirstonding of hooly writ with outen charite that kepith Goddis heestis, makith a man depper dampned. . . . and pride and covetise of clerkis is cause of her blindees and eresie, and priveth them fro verrey undirstondyng of holy writ."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Knighton, about 1400, wrote thus of Wiclif: "*Transtulit de Latino in anglicam linguam, non angelicam. Unde per ipsum fit vulgare, et magis apertum laicis et mulieribus legere scientibus quam solet esse clericis admodum litteratis, et bene intelligentibus. Et sic evangelica margarita spargitur et a porcis conculcatur. . . . (ita) ut laicis commune eternum quod ante fuerat clericis et ecclesiis doctoribus talentum supernum.*"

<sup>2</sup> Wiclif's Bible, ed. Forshall and Madden, 1850, preface to Oxford edition, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*





*JOHN WICLIF*





These are the memorable words that began to circulate in the markets and in the schools. They read the translated Bible, and commented on it; they judged the existing Church after it. What judgments these serious and untainted minds passed upon it, with what readiness they pushed on to the true religion of their race, we may see from their petition to Parliament.<sup>1</sup> One hundred and thirty years before Luther, they said that the pope was not established by Christ, that pilgrimages and image-worship were akin to idolatry, that external rites are of no importance, that priests ought not to possess temporal wealth, that the doctrine of transubstantiation made a people idolatrous, that priests have not the power of absolving from sin. In proof of all this they brought forward texts of Scripture. Fancy these brave spirits, simple and strong souls, who began to read at night in their shops, by candle-light; for they were shopkeepers—tailors, skimmers, and bakers—who, with some men of letters, began to read, and then to believe, and finally got themselves burned.<sup>2</sup> What a sight for the fifteenth century, and what a promise! It seems as though, with liberty of action, liberty of mind begins to appear; that these common folk will think and speak; that under the conventional literature, imitated from France, a new literature is dawning; and that England, genuine England, half-mute since the Conquest, will at last find a voice.

She had not yet found it. King and peers ally themselves to the Church, pass terrible statutes, destroy books, burn heretics alive, often with refinement of torture,—one in a barrel, another hung by an iron chain

<sup>1</sup> In 1395.

<sup>2</sup> 1401, William Sawtré, the first Lollard burned alive.

round his waist. The temporal wealth of the clergy had been attacked, and therewith the whole English constitution ; and the great establishment above crushed out with its whole weight the revolutionists from below. Darkly, in silence, while the nobles were destroying each other in the Wars of the Roses, the commons went on working and living, separating themselves from the established Church, maintaining their liberties, amassing wealth, but not going further.<sup>1</sup> Like a vast rock which underlies the soil, yet crops up here and there at distant intervals, they barely show themselves. No great poetical or religious work displays them to the light. They sang ; but their ballads, first ignored, then transformed, reach us only in a late edition. They prayed ; but beyond one or two indifferent poems, their incomplete and repressed doctrine bore no fruit. We may well see from the verse, tone, and drift of their ballads, that they are capable of the finest poetic originality,<sup>2</sup> but their poetry is in the hands of yeomen and harpers. We perceive, by the precocity and energy of their religious protests, that they are capable of the most severe and impassioned creeds ; but their faith remains hidden in the shop-parlours of a few obscure sectaries. Neither their faith nor their poetry has been

<sup>1</sup> Commynes, v. ch. 19 and 20 : "In my opinion, of all kingdoms of the world of which I have any knowledge, where the public weal is best observed, and least violence is exercised on the people, and where no buildings are overthrown or demolished in war, England is the best ; and the ruin and misfortune falls on them who wage the war. . . . The kingdom of England has this advantage beyond other nations, that the people and the country are not destroyed or burnt, nor the buildings demolished ; and ill-fortune falls on men of war, and especially on the nobles."

<sup>2</sup> See the ballads of  *Chevy Chase*,  *The Nut-Brown Maid*, etc. Many of them are admirable little dramas.

able to attain its end or issue. The Renaissance and the Reformation, those two national outbreaks, are still far off; and the literature of the period retains to the end, like the highest ranks of English society, almost the perfect stamp of its French origin and its foreign models.

## CHAPTER III.

*The New Tongue.*

## I.

AMID so many barren endeavours, throughout the long impotence of Norman literature, which was content to copy, and of Saxon literature, which bore no fruit, a definite language was nevertheless formed, and there was room for a great writer. Geoffrey Chaucer appeared, a man of mark, inventive though a disciple, original though a translator, who by his genius, education, and life, was enabled to know and to depict a whole world, but above all to satisfy the chivalric world and the splendid courts which shone upon the heights.<sup>1</sup> He belonged to it, though learned and versed in all branches of scholastic knowledge; and he took such a share in it, that his life from beginning to end was that of a man of the world, and a man of action. We find him by turns in King Edward's army, in the king's train, husband of a maid of honour to the queen, a pensioner, a placeholder, a member of Parliament, a knight, founder of a family which was hereafter to become allied to royalty. Moreover, he was in the king's council, brother-in-law of John of Gaunt, employed more than once in open embassies or secret missions at Florence, Genoa, Milan, Flanders, commissioner in France for the marriage

<sup>1</sup> Born between 1328 and 1345, died in 1400.



of the Prince of Wales, high up and low down on the political ladder, disgraced, restored to place. This experience of business, travel, war, and the court, was not like a book-education. He was at the court of Edward III., the most splendid in Europe, amidst tourneys, grand receptions, magnificent displays; he took part in the pomps of France and Milan; conversed with Petrarch, perhaps with Boccaccio and Froissart; was actor in, and spectator of, the finest and most tragical of dramas. In these few words, what ceremonies and cavalcades are implied! what processions in armour, what caparisoned horses, bedizened ladies! what display of gallant and lordly manners! what a varied and brilliant world, well suited to occupy the mind and eyes of a poet! Like Froissart, and better than he, Chaucer could depict the castles of the nobles, their conversations, their talk of love, and anything else that concerned them, and please them by his portraiture.

## II.

Two notions raised the middle age above the chaos of barbarism: one religious, which had fashioned the gigantic cathedrals, and swept the masses from their native soil to hurl them upon the Holy Land; the other secular, which had built feudal fortresses, and set the man of courage erect and armed, within his own domain: the one had produced the adventurous hero, the other the mystical monk; the one, to wit, the belief in God, the other the belief in self. Both, running to excess, had degenerated by the violence of their own strength: the one had exalted independence into rebellion, the other had turned piety into enthusiasm: the first made man unfit for civil life, the second drew him back from

natural life : the one, sanctioning disorder, dissolved society ; the other, enthroning infatuation, perverted intelligence. Chivalry had need to be repressed because it issued in brigandage ; devotion restrained because it induced slavery. Turbulent feudalism grew feeble, like oppressive theocracy ; and the two great master passions, deprived of their sap and lopped of their stem, gave place by their weakness to the monotony of habit and the taste for worldliness, which shot forth in their stead and flourished under their name.

Gradually, the serious element declined, in books as in manners, in works of art as in books. Architecture, instead of being the handmaid of faith, became the slave of phantasy. It was exaggerated, became too ornamental, sacrificing general effect to detail, shot up its steeples to unreasonable heights, decorated its churches with canopies, pinnacles, trefoiled gables, open-work galleries. "Its whole aim was continually to climb higher, to clothe the sacred edifice with a gaudy bedizenment, as if it were a bride on her wedding morning."<sup>1</sup> Before this marvellous lacework, what emotion could one feel but a pleased astonishment ? What becomes of Christian sentiment before such scenic ornamentations ? In like manner literature sets itself to play. In the eighteenth century, the second age of absolute monarchy, we saw on one side finials and floriated cupolas, on the other pretty *vers de société*, courtly and sprightly tales, taking the place of severe beauty-lines and noble writings. Even so in the fourteenth century, the second age of feudalism, they had on one side the stone fretwork and slender efflorescence of aerial forms, and on the other finical verses and

<sup>1</sup> Renan, *De l'Art au Moyen Âge*.

diverting stories, taking the place of the old grand architecture and the old simple literature. It is no longer the overflowing of a true sentiment which produces them, but the craving for excitement. Consider Chaucer, his subjects, and how he selects them. He goes far and wide to discover them, to Italy, France, to the popular legends, the ancient classics. His readers need diversity, and his business is to "provide fine tales:" it was in those days the poet's business.<sup>1</sup> The lords at table have finished dinner, the minstrels come and sing, the brightness of the torches falls on the velvet and ermine, on the fantastic figures, the motley, the elaborate embroidery of their long garments; then the poet arrives, presents his manuscript, "richly illuminated, bound in crimson violet, embellished with silver clasps and bosses, roses of gold:" they ask him what his subject is, and he answers "Love."

### III.

In fact, it is the most agreeable subject, fittest to make the evening hours pass sweetly, amid the goblets filled with spiced wine and the burning perfumes. Chaucer translated first that great storehouse of gallantry, the *Roman de la Rose*. There is no pleasanter entertainment. It is about a rose which the lover wished to pluck: the pictures of the May months, the groves, the flowery earth, the green hedgerows, abound and display their bloom. Then come portraits of the smiling ladies, Richesse, Fraunchise, Gaiety, and by way of contrast, the sad characters, Daunger and

<sup>1</sup> See Froissart, his life with the Count of Foix and with King Richard II.

Travail, all fully and minutely described, with detail of features, clothing, attitude; they walk about, as on a piece of tapestry, amid landscapes, dances, castles, among allegorical groups, in lively sparkling colours, displayed, contrasted, ever renewed and varied so as to entertain the sight. For an evil has arisen, unknown to serious ages—*ennui*: novelty and brilliancy followed by novelty and brilliancy are necessary to withstand it; and Chaucer, like Boccaccio and Froissart, enters into the struggle with all his heart. He borrows from Boccaccio his history of Palamon and Arcite, from Lollius his history of Troilus and Cressida, and rearranges them. How the two young Theban knights, Arcite and Palamon, both fall in love with the beautiful Emily, and how Arcite, victorious in tourney, falls and dies, bequeathing Emily to his rival; how the fine Trojan knight Troilus wins the favour of Cressida, and how Cressida abandons him for Diomedes—these are still tales in verse, tales of love. A little tedious they may be; all the writings of this age; French, or imitated from French, are born of too prodigal minds; but how they glide along! A winding stream, which flows smoothly on level sand, and sparkles now and again in the sun, is the only image we can compare it to. The characters speak too much, but then they speak so well! Even when they dispute, we like to listen, their anger and offences are so wholly based on a happy overflow of unbroken converse. Remember Froissart, how slaughters, assassinations, plagues, the butcheries of the Jacquerie, the whole chaos of human misery, disappears in his fine ceaseless humour, so that the furious and grinning figures seem but ornaments and choice embroideries to relieve the skein of shaded

and coloured silk which forms the groundwork of his narrative ! but, in particular, a multitude of descriptions spread their gilding over all. Chaucer leads you among arms, palaces, temples, and halts before each beautiful thing. Here :

“The statue of Venus glorious for to see  
Was naked fleting in the large see,  
And fro the navel doun all covered was  
With wawes grene, and bright as any glas.  
A citole in hire right hand hadde she,  
And on hire hed, ful semely for to see,  
A rose gerlond fresch, and wel smelling,  
Above hire hed hire doves fleckering.”<sup>1</sup>

Further on, the temple of Mars :

“First on the wall was painted a forest,  
In which ther wonneth neyther man ne best,  
With knotty knarry barrein trees old  
Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to behold ;  
In which ther ran a romble and a swough,  
As though a storme shuld bresten every bough :  
And dounward from an hill under a bent.  
Ther stood the temple of Mars armipotent,  
Wrought all of burned stele, of which th’ entree  
Was longe and streite, and gastly for to see.  
And therout came a rage and swiche a vise,  
That it made all the gates for to rise.  
The northern light in at the dore shone,  
For window on the wall ne was ther none,  
Thurgh which men mighten any light discerna.  
The dore was all of athamant eterne,  
Yclenched overthwart and endelong  
With yren tough, and for to make it strong,

<sup>1</sup> *Knight's Tale*, ii. p. 59, l. 1957-1964.

Every piler the temple to sustene  
Was tonne-gret, of yren bright and shene."<sup>1</sup>

Everywhere on the wall were representations of slaughter; and in the sanctuary

"The statue of Mars upon a carte stood  
Armed, and loked grim as he were wood, . . .  
A wolf ther stood beforne him at his fete  
With eyen red, and of a man he ete."<sup>2</sup>

Are not these contrasts well designed to rouse the imagination? You will meet in Chaucer a succession of similar pictures. Observe the train of combatants who came to joust in the tilting field for Arcite and Palamon:

"With him ther wenten knightes many on.  
Som wol ben armed in an habergeon  
And in a brestplate, and in a gipon;  
And som wol have a pair of plates large;  
And som wol have a Puce sheld, or a targe,  
Som wol ben armed on his legges wele,  
And have an axe, and som a mace of steele. . . .  
Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon  
Licurge himself, the grete king of Trace:  
Blake was his berd, and manly was his face.  
The cercles of his eyen in his hed  
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,  
And like a griffon loked he about,  
With kemped heres on his browes stout;  
His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,  
His shouldres brode, his armes round and longe,  
And as the guise was in his contree,  
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,  
With foure white bolles in the traia.

<sup>1</sup> *Knight's Tale*, ii. p. 59, l. 1977-1996.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61, l. 2048-2050.

Instede of cote-armure on his harnais,  
With nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,  
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake for old,  
His longe here was kempt behind his bak,  
As any ravenes fether it shone for blake.  
A wreth of gold arm-gret, of huge weight,  
Upon his hed sate ful of stones bright,  
Of fine rubins and of diamanta.  
About his char ther wenten white alauns,  
Twenty and mo, as gret as any stere,  
To hunten at the leon or the dere,  
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound,  
Colered with gold, and torettes filed round.  
An hundred lordes had he in his route,  
Armed ful wel, with hertes sterne and stoute,  
With Arcita, in stories as men find,  
The gret Emetrius the king of Inde,  
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,  
Covered with cloth of gold diapred wale,  
Came riding like the god of armes Mars.  
His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tara,  
Couched with perles, white, and round and greta.  
His sadel was of brent gold new ybete;  
A mantelet upon his shouldres hanging  
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.  
His crise here like ringes was yronne,  
And that was yelwe, and glitered as the sonne.  
His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,  
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin . . .  
And as a leon he his loking caste.  
Of five and twenty yere his age I caste.  
His berd was well begonnen for to spring;  
His vois was as a trompe thondering.  
Upon his hed he wered of laurer grene  
A gerlond freshe and lusty for to seme.

Upon his hond he bare for his deduit  
 An egle tame, as any lily whit.  
 An hundred lordes had he with him there,  
 All armed save hir hedes in all hir gere,  
 Ful richely in alle manere thinges . . .  
 About this king ther ran on every part  
 Ful many a tame leon and leopart."<sup>1</sup>

A herald would not describe them better nor more fully. The lords and ladies of the time would recognise here their tourneys and masquerades.

There is something more pleasant than a fine narrative, and that is a collection of fine narratives, especially when the narratives are all of different colourings. Froissart gives us such under the name of *Chronicles*; Boccaccio still better; after him the lords of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*; and, later still, Marguerite of Navarre. What more natural among people who meet, talk, and wish to amuse themselves. The manners of the time suggest them; for the habits and tastes of society had begun, and fiction thus conceived only brings into books the conversations which are heard in the hall and by the wayside. Chaucer describes a troop of pilgrims, people of every rank, who are going to Canterbury; a knight, a sergeant of law, an Oxford clerk, a doctor, a miller, a prioress, a monk, who agree to tell a story all round:

"For trewely comfort ne mirthe is non,  
 To riden by the way domb as the ston."

They tell their stories accordingly; and on this slender and flexible thread all the jewels of feudal imagination, real or false, contribute one after another their motley shapes to form a necklace; side by side with noble

<sup>1</sup> *Knight's Tale*, ii. p. 63, l. 2120-2123.



and chivalrous stories: we have the miracle of an infant whose throat was cut by Jews, the trials of patient Griselda, Canace and marvellous fictions of Oriental fancy, obscene stories of marriage and monks, allegorical or moral tales, the fable of the cock and hen, a list of great unfortunate persons: Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Nebuchadnezzar, Zenobia, Cresus, Ugolino, Peter of Spain. I leave out some, for I must be brief. Chaucer is like a jeweller with his hands full: pearls and glass beads, sparkling diamonds and common agates, black jet and ruby roses, all that history and imagination had been able to gather and fashion during three centuries in the East, in France, in Wales, in Provence, in Italy, all that had rolled his way, clashed together, broken or polished by the stream of centuries, and by the great jumble of human memory, he holds in his hand, arranges it, composes therefrom a long sparkling ornament, with twenty pendants, a thousand facets, which by its splendour, variety, contrasts, may attract and satisfy the eyes of those most greedy for amusement and novelty.

He does more. The universal outburst of unchecked curiosity demands a more refined enjoyment: reverie and fantasy alone can satisfy it; not profound and thoughtful fantasy as we find it in Shakspeare, nor impassioned and meditative reverie as we find it in Dante, but the reverie and fantasy of the eyes, ears, external senses, which in poetry as in architecture call for singularity, wonders, accepted challenges, victories gained over the rational and probable, and which are satisfied only by what is crowded and dazzling. When we look at a cathedral of that time, we feel a sort of fear. Substance is wanting; the walls are hollowed

out to make room for windows, the elaborate work of the porches, the wonderful growth of the slender columns, the thin curvature of arches—everything seems to menace us; support has been withdrawn to give way to ornament. Without external prop or buttress, and artificial aid of iron clamp-work, the building would have crumbled to pieces on the first day; as it is, it undoes itself; we have to maintain on the spot a colony of masons continually to ward off the continual decay. But our sight grows dim in following the wavings and twistings of the endless fretwork; the dazzling rose-window of the portal and the painted glass throw a chequered light on the carved stalls of the choir, the gold-work of the altar, the long array of damascened and glittering copes, the crowd of statues, tier above tier; and amid this violet light, this quivering purple, amid these arrows of gold which pierce the gloom, the entire building is like the tail of a mystical peacock. So most of the poems of the time are barren of foundation; at most a trite morality serves them for mainstay: in short, the poet thought of nothing else than displaying before us a glow of colours and a jumble of forms. They are dreams or visions; there are five or six in Chaucer, and you will meet more on your advance to the Renaissance. But the show is splendid. Chaucer is transported in a dream to a temple of glass,<sup>1</sup> on the walls of which are figured in gold all the legends of Ovid and Virgil, an infinite train of characters and dresses, like that which, on the painted glass in the churches, occupied then the gaze of the faithful. Suddenly a golden eagle, which soars near the sun, and glitters like a carbuncle descends with the swiftness of

<sup>1</sup> The House of Fame.

lightning, and carries him off in his talons above the stars, dropping him at last before the House of Fame, splendidly built of beryl, with shining windows and lofty turrets, and situated on a high rock of almost inaccessible ice. All the southern side was graven with the names of famous men, but the sun was continuously melting them. On the northern side, the names, better protected, still remained. On the turrets appeared the minstrels and "gestiours," with Orpheus, Arion, and the great harpers, and behind them myriads of musicians, with horns, flutes, bag-pipes, and reeds, on which they played, and which filled the air; then all the charmers, magicians, and prophets. He enters, and in a high hall, plated with gold, embossed with pearls, on a throne of carbuncle, he sees a woman seated, a "noble quene," amidst an infinite number of heralds, whose embroidered cloaks bore the arms of the most famous knights in the world, and heard the sounds of instruments, and the celestial melody of Calliope and her sisters. From her throne to the gate was a row of pillars, on which stood the great historians and poets; Josephus on a pillar of lead and iron; Statius on a pillar of iron stained with tiger's blood; Ovid, "Venus' clerk," on a pillar of copper; then, on one higher than the rest, Homer and Livy, Dares the Phrygian, Guido Colonna, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the other historians of the war of Troy. Must I go on copying this phantasmagoria, in which confused erudition mars picturesque invention, and frequent banter shows sign that the vision is only a planned amusement? The poet and his reader have imagined for half-an-hour decorated halls and bustling crowds; a slender thread of common sense has ingeniously crept along the

transparent golden mist which they amuse themselves with following. That suffices; they are pleased with their fleeting fancies, and ask no more.

Amid this exuberancy of mind, amid these refined cravings, and this insatiate exaltation of imagination and the senses, there was one passion, that of love, which, combining all, was developed in excess, and displayed in miniature the sickly charm, the fundamental and fatal exaggeration, which are the characteristics of the age, and which, later, the Spanish civilisation exhibits both in its flower and its decay. Long ago, the courts of love in Provence had established the theory. "Each one who loves," they said, "grows pale at the sight of her whom he loves; each action of the lover ends in the thought of her whom he loves. Love can refuse nothing to love."<sup>1</sup> This search after excessive sensation had ended in the ecstasies and transports of Guido Cavalcanti, and of Dante; and in Languedoc a company of enthusiasts had established themselves, love-penitents, who, in order to prove the violence of their passion, dressed in summer in furs and heavy garments, and in winter in light gauze, and walked thus about the country, so that several of them fell ill and died. Chaucer, in their wake, explained in his verses the craft of love,<sup>2</sup> the ten commandments, the twenty statutes of love; and praised his lady, his "daieseye," his "Margarite," his "vermeil rose;" depicted love in ballads, visions, allegories, didactic poems, in a hundred guises. This is chivalrous, lofty love, as it was conceived in the middle age; above all, tender love. Troilus loves

<sup>1</sup> André le Chapelain, 1170.

<sup>2</sup> Also the *Court of Love*, and perhaps *The Assemblé of Ladies and La Belle Dame sans Merci*.

Cressida like a troubadour; without Pandarus, her uncle, he would have languished, and ended by dying in silence. He will not reveal the name of her he loves. Pandarus has to tear it from him, perform all the bold actions himself, plan every kind of stratagem. Troilus, however brave and strong in battle, can but weep before Cressida, ask her pardon, and faint. Cressida, on her side, has every delicate feeling. When Pandarus brings her Troilus' first letter, she begins by refusing it, and is ashamed to open it: she opens it only because she is told the poor knight is about to die. At the first words "all rosy hewed tho woxe she;" and though the letter is respectful, she will not answer it. She yields at last to the importunities of her uncle, and answers Troilus that she will feel for him the affection of a sister. As to Troilus, he trembles all over, grows pale when he sees the messenger return, doubts his happiness, and will not believe the assurance which is given him:

" But right so as these holtes and these hayis  
That han in winter dead ben and dry,  
Revesten hem in grene, whan that May is. . . .  
Right in that selfe wise, sooth for to sey,  
Woxe suddainly his herte full of joy."<sup>1</sup>

Slowly, after many troubles, and thanks to the efforts of Pandarus, he obtains her confession; and in this confession what a delightful charm!

" And as the newe abashed nightingale,  
That stinteth first, whan she beginneth sing,  
Whan that she heareth any heerdes tale,  
Or in the hedges any wight steering,  
And after siker doeth her voice outring:

<sup>1</sup> *Troilus and Cressida*, vol. v. bk. 3, p. 12.

Right so Cresseide, whan that her drede stent,  
Opened her herte and told him her entent."<sup>1</sup>

He, as soon as he perceived a hope from afar,

"In chaunged voice, right for his very drede,  
Which voice eke quoke, and thereto his manere,  
Goodly abasht, and now his hewes rede,  
Now pale, unto Cresseide his ladie dere,  
With looke down cast, and humble yolden chere,  
Lo, the alderfirst word that him astart  
Was twice: 'Mercy, mercy, O my sweet herte!'"<sup>2</sup>

This ardent love breaks out in impassioned accents, in bursts of happiness. Far from being regarded as a fault, it is the source of all virtue. Troilus becomes braver, more generous, more upright, through it; his speech runs now on love and virtue; he scorns all villany; he honours those who possess merit, succours those who are in distress; and Cressida, delighted, repeats all day, with exceeding liveliness, this song, which is like the warbling of a nightingale:

"Whom should I thanken but you, god of love,  
Of all this blisse, in which to bathe I ginne?  
And thanked be ye, lorde for that I love,  
This is the right life that I am inne,  
To flemen all maner vice and sinne:  
This dooth me so to vertue for to entende  
That daie by daie I in my will amende.  
And who that saieth that for to love is vice, . . .  
He either is envious, or right nice,  
Or is unmightie for his shreudnesse  
To loven. . . .  
But I with all mine herte and all my might,  
As I have saied, woll love unto my last,

<sup>1</sup> *Troilus and Cressida*, vol. v. bk. 3, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

My owne dere herte, and all mine owne knight,  
 In whiche mine herte growen is so fast,  
 And his in me, that it shall ever last." <sup>1</sup>

But misfortune comes. Her father Calchas demands her back, and the Trojans decide that they will give her up in exchange for prisoners. At this news she swoons, and Troilus is about to slay himself. Their love at this time seems imperishable ; it sports with death, because it constitutes the whole of life. Beyond that better and delicious life which it created, it seems there can be no other :

" But as God would, of swough she abraide,  
 And gan to sighe, and Troilus she cride,  
 And he answerde : ' Lady mine, Creseide,  
 Live ye yet ? ' and let his swerde down glide :

' Ye herte mine, that thanked be Cupide,  
 (Quod she), and therewithal she sore sight,  
 And he began to glade her as he might.

Took her in armes two and kist her oft,  
 And her to glad, he did al his entent,  
 For which her gost, that flikered aie a loft,  
 Into her wofull herte ayen it went :  
 But at the last, as that her eye glent  
 Aside, anon she gan his sworde aspie,  
 As it lay bare, and gan for feare cria.

And asked him why had he it out draw,  
 And Troilus anon the cause her told,  
 And how himself therewith he wold have alain,  
 For which Creseide upon him gan behold,  
 And gan him in her armes faste fold,  
 And said : ' O mercy God, lo which a dede !  
 Alas, how nigh we weren bothe dede ! ' " <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Troilus and Creseide*, vol. iv. bk. 2, p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* vol. v. bk. 4, p. 97.

At last they are separated, with what vows and what tears ! and Troilus, alone in his chamber, murmurs :

“ ‘ Where is mine owne lady lefe and dere ?  
 Where is her white brest, where is it, where ?  
 Where been her armes, and her eyen clere  
 That yesterday this time with me were ? ’ . . .  
 Nor there nas houre in al the day or night,  
 Whan he was ther as no man might him here,  
 That he ne sayd : ‘ O lovesome lady bright,  
 How have ye faren sins that ye were there ?  
 Welcome ywis mine owne lady dere ! ’ . . .  
 Fro thence-forth he rideth up and doun,  
 And every thing came him to remembraunce,  
 As he rode forth by the places of the toun,  
 In which he whilom had all his pleasaunce :  
 ‘ Lo, yonder saw I mine owne lady daunce,  
 And in that temple with her eien clere,  
 Me caught first my right lady dere.  
 And yonder have I herde full lustely  
 My dere herte laugh, and yonder play  
 Saw her ones eke ful blisfully,  
 And yonder ones to me gan she say,  
 ‘ Now, good sweete, love me well I pray.  
 And yonde so goodly gan she me behold,  
 That to the death mine herte is to her hold,  
 And at the corner in the yonder house  
 Herde I mine alderlevest lady dere,  
 So womanly, with voice melodious,  
 Singen so wel, so goodly, and so clere,  
 That in my soule yet me thinketh I here  
 The blisful sowne, and in that yonder place,  
 My lady first me toke unto her grace.’ ”<sup>1</sup>.

None has since found more true and tender words.

<sup>1</sup> *Troilus and Crassida*, vol. v. bk. 5, p. 119 *et passim*.



These are the charming "poetic branches" which flourished amid gross ignorance and pompous parades. Human intelligence in the middle age had blossomed on that side where it perceived the light.

But mere narrative does not suffice to express his felicity and fancy; the poet must go where "shoures sweet of rain descended soft."

"And every plaine was clothed faire  
With new greene, and maketh small floures  
To springen here and there in field and in mede,  
So very good and wholesome be the shoures,  
That it renueth that was old and dede,  
In winter time; and out of every sede  
Springeth the hearbe, so that every wight  
Of this season wexeth glad and light. . . .  
In which (grove) were okes great, streight as a line,  
Under the which the grasse so fresh of hew  
Was newly sprong, and an eight foot or nine  
Every tree well fro his fellow grew."

He must forget himself in the vague felicity of the country, and, like Dante, lose himself in ideal light and allegory. The dreams of love, to continue true, must not take too visible a form, nor enter into a too consecutive history; they must float in a misty distance; the soul in which they hover can no longer think of the laws of existence; it inhabits another world; it forgets itself in the ravishing emotion which troubles it, and sees its well-loved visions rise, mingle, come and go, as in summer we see the bees on a hill-slope flutter in a haze of light, and circle round and round the flowers.

One morning,<sup>1</sup> a lady sings, at the dawn of day, I entered an oak-grove

<sup>1</sup> *The Flower and the Leaf*, vi. p. 244, l. 6-32.

"With branches brode, laden with leves new,  
That sprongen out ayen the sunne-shene,  
Some very red, and some a glad light grene. . . .<sup>1</sup>

And I, that all this pleasaunt sight sie,  
Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire  
Of the eglentere, that certainly  
There is no hert, I deme, in such dispaire,  
Ne with thoughts froward and contraire,  
So overlaid, but it should soone have bote,  
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

And as I stood, and cast aside mine eie,  
I was ware of the fairest medler tree  
That ever yet in all my life I sie,  
As full of blossomes as it might be ;  
Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile  
Fro bough to bough ; and, as him list, he cet  
Here and there of buds and floures sweet. . . .

And as I sat, the birds harkening thus,  
Methought that I heard voices sodainly,  
The most sweetest and most delicious  
That ever any wight, I trow truly,  
Heard in their life, for the armony  
And sweet accord was in so good musike,  
That the voice to angels most was like."<sup>2</sup>

Then she sees arrive "a world of ladies . . . in surcotes  
white of velvet . . . set with emerauds . . . as of  
great pearles round and orient, and diamonds fine and  
rubies red." And all had on their head "a rich fret of  
gold . . . full of stately riche stones set," with "a  
chapelet of branches fresh and grene . . . some of

<sup>1</sup> *The Flower and the Leaf*, p. 245, l. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* vi. p. 246, l. 78-183.

laurer, some of woodbind, some of agnus castus ;" and at the same time came a train of valiant knights in splendid array, with "harneis" of red gold, shining in the sun, and noble steeds, with trappings "of cloth of gold, and furred with ermine." These knights and ladies were the servants of the Leaf, and they sate under a great oak, at the feet of their queen.

From the other side came a bevy of ladies as resplendent as the first, but crowned with fresh flowers. These were the servants of the Flower. They alighted, and began to dance in the meadow. But heavy clouds appeared in the sky, and a storm broke out. They wished to shelter themselves under the oak, but there was no more room ; they ensconced themselves as they could in the hedges and among the brushwood ; the rain came down and spoiled their garlands, stained their robes, and washed away their ornaments ; when the sun returned, they went to ask succour from the queen of the Leaf ; she, being merciful, consoled them, repaired the injury of the rain, and restored their original beauty. Then all disappears as in a dream.

The lady was astonished, when suddenly a fair dame appeared and instructed her. She learned that the servants of the Leaf had lived like brave knights, and those of the Flower had loved idleness and pleasure. She promises to serve the Leaf, and came away.

Is this an allegory ? There is at least a lack of wit. There is no ingenious enigma ; it is dominated by fancy, and the poet thinks only of displaying in quiet verse the fleeting and brilliant train which had amused his mind, and charmed his eyes.

Chaucer himself, on the first of May, rises and goes out into the meadows. Love enters his heart with the

balmy air ; the landscape is transfigured, and the birds begin to speak :

There sate I downe among the faire flours,  
And saw the birds trip out of hir bours,  
There as they rested hem all the night,  
They were so joyfull of the dayes light,  
They began of May for to done honours.

They coud that service all by rote,  
There was many a lovely note,  
Some song loud as they had plained,  
And some in other manner voice yfained  
And some all out with the ful throte.

The proyned hem and made hem right gay,  
And daunceden, and lepten on the spray,  
And evermore two and two in fere,  
Right so as they had chosen hem to yere,  
In Feverere upon saint Valentines day.

And the-river that I sate upon,  
It made such a noise as it ron,  
Accordaunt with the birdes armory,  
Methought it was the best melody  
That might ben yheard of any mon."<sup>1</sup>

This confused harmony of vague noises troubles the sense ; a secret languor enters the soul. The cuckoo throws his monotonous voice like a mournful and tender sigh between the white ash-tree boles ; the nightingale makes his triumphant notes roll and ring above the leafy canopy ; fancy breaks in unsought, and Chaucer hears them dispute of Love. They sing alternately an antistrophic song, and the nightingale weeps for vexation to hear the cuckoo speak in depreciation of Love. He

<sup>1</sup> *The Cuckoo and Nightingale*, vi. p. 121, l. 67-85.

is consoled, however, by the poet's voice, seeing that he also suffers with him :

“ ‘ For love and it hath doe me much wo,’  
 ‘ Ye use’ (quod she) ‘ this medicine  
 Every day this May or thou dine  
 Go looke upon the fresh daisie,  
 And though thou be for wo in point to die,  
 That shall full greatly lessen thee of thy pine.  
 ‘ And looke alway that thou be good and trew,  
 And I wol sing one of the songes new,  
 For love of thee, as loud as I may crie :’  
 And than she began this song full hie,  
 ‘ I shrewe all hem that been of love untrue.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

To such exquisite delicacies love, as with Petrarch, had carried poetry ; by refinement even, as with Petrarch, it is lost now and then in its wit, conceits, clinches. But a marked characteristic at once separates it from Petrarch. If over-excited, it is also graceful, polished, full of archness, banter, fine sensual gaiety, somewhat gossipy, as the French always paint love. Chaucer follows his true masters, and is himself an elegant speaker, facile, ever ready to smile, loving choice pleasures, a disciple of the *Roman de la Rose*, and much less Italian than French.<sup>2</sup> The bent of French character makes of love not a passion, but a gay banquet, tastefully arranged, in which the service is elegant, the food exquisite, the silver brilliant, the two guests in full dress, in good humour, quick to anticipate and please each other, knowing how to keep up the gaiety, and when to part. In Chaucer, without doubt, this other

<sup>1</sup> *The Cuckoo and Nightingale*, vi. p. 126, l. 230-241.

<sup>2</sup> *Stendhal, On Love* : the difference of Love-taste and Love-passion.

altogether worldly vein runs side by side with the sentimental element. If Troilus is a weeping lover, Pandarus is a lively rascal, who volunteers for a singular service with amusing urgency, frank immorality, and carries it out carefully, gratuitously, thoroughly. In these pretty attempts Chaucer accompanies him as far as possible, and is not shocked. On the contrary, he makes fun out of it. At the critical moment, with transparent hypocrisy, he shelters himself behind his "author." If you find the particulars free, he says, it is not my fault; "so writen clerks in hir bokes old," and "I mote, aftir min auctour, telle . . ." Not only is he gay, but he jests throughout the whole tale. He sees clearly through the tricks of feminine modesty; he laughs at it archly, knowing full well what is behind; he seems to be saying, finger on lip: "Hush! let the grand words roll on, you will be edified presently." We are, in fact, edified; so is he, and in the nick of time he goes away, carrying the light: "For ought I can aspies, this light nor I ne serven here of nought." "Troilus," says uncle Pandarus, "if ye be wise, sweveneth not now, lest more folke arise." Troilus takes care not to swoon; and Cressida at last, being alone with him, speaks wittily and with prudent delicacy; there is here an exceeding charm, no coarseness. Their happiness covers all, even voluptuousness, with a profusion and perfume of its heavenly roses. At most a slight spice of archness flavours it: "and gode thrift he had full oft." Troilus holds his mistress in his arms: "with worse hap God let us never mete." The poet is almost as well pleased as they: for him, as for the men of his time, the sovereign good is love, not damped, but satisfied; they ended even by thinking such love a

merit. The ladies declared in their judgments, that when people love, they can refuse nothing to the beloved. Love has become law; it is inscribed in a code; they combine it with religion; and there is a sacrament of love, in which the birds in their anthems sing matins.<sup>1</sup> Chaucer curses with all his heart the covetous wretches, the business men, who treat it as a madness:

“As would God, the wretches that despise  
Service of love had cares al so long  
As had Mida, ful of covetise, . . .  
To teachen hem, that they been in the vice  
And lovers not, although they hold hem nice,  
. . . God yeve hem mischaunce,  
And every lover in his trouth avaunce.”<sup>2</sup>

He clearly lacks severity, so rare in southern literature. The Italians in the middle age made a virtue of joy; and you perceive that the world of chivalry, as conceived by the French, expanded morality so as to confound it with pleasure.

#### IV.

There are other characteristics still more gay. The true Gallic literature crops up; obscene tales, practical jokes on one's neighbour, not shrouded in the Ciceronian style of Boccaccio, but related lightly by a man in good humour;<sup>3</sup> above all, active roguery, the trick of laughing at your neighbour's expense. Chaucer displays it better than Rutebeuf, and sometimes better than La Fontaine. He does not knock his men down; he pricks them as

<sup>1</sup> *The Court of Love*, about 1353, *et seq.* See also the *Testament of Love*.

<sup>2</sup> *Troilus and Cressida*, vol. v. iii. pp. 44, 45.

<sup>3</sup> The story of the pear-tree (Merchant's Tale), and of the cradle (Reeve's Tale), for instance, in the *Canterbury Tales*.

he passes, not from deep hatred or indignation, but through sheer nimbleness of disposition, and quick sense of the ridiculous; he throws his gibes at them by handfuls. His man of law is more a man of business than of the world:

"No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as,  
And yet he semed besier than he was."<sup>1</sup>

His three burgesses:

"Everich, for the wisdom that he can  
Was shapelich for to ben an alderman.  
For catel hadden they ynough and rent,  
And eke hir wives wolde it wel assent."<sup>2</sup>

Of the mendicant Friar he says:

"His wallet lay beforne him in his lappe,  
Bret-ful of pardon come from Rome al hote."<sup>3</sup>

The mockery here comes from the heart, in the French manner, without effort, calculation, or vehemence. It is so pleasant and so natural to banter one's neighbour! Sometimes the lively vein becomes so copious, that it furnishes an entire comedy, indelicate certainly, but so free and life-like! Here is the portrait of the Wife of Bath, who has buried five husbands;

"Bold was hire face, and fayre and rede of hew,  
She was a worthy woman all hire live;  
Housbondes at the chirche dore had she had five,  
Withouten other compaignie in youthe. . . .  
In all the parish wif ne was ther non,  
That to the offring before hire shulde gon,  
And if ther did, certain so wroth was she,  
That she was out of alle charitee."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, prologue, p. 10, l. 323.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12, l. 373.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21, l. 688.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* ii. prologue, p. 14, l. 400.



What a tongue she has ! Impertinent, full of vanity, bold, chattering, unbridled, she silences everybody, and holds forth for an hour before coming to her tale. We hear her grating, high-pitched, loud, clear voice, wherewith she deafened her husbands. She continually harps upon the same ideas, repeats her reasons, piles them up and confounds them, like a stubborn mule who runs along shaking and ringing his bells, so that the stunned listeners remain open-mouthed, wondering that a single tongue can spin out so many words. The subject was worth the trouble. She proves that she did well to marry five husbands, and she proves it clearly, like a woman who knew it, because she had tried it :

“ God bad us for to wex and multiplie ;  
That gentil text can I wel understond ;  
Eke wel I wot, he sayd, that min husbond  
Shuld leve fader and moder, and take to me ;  
But of no noumbre mention made he,  
Of bigamie or of octogamie ;  
Why shuld men than speke of it vilanie ?  
Lo here the wise king dan Solomon,  
I trow he hadde wives mo than on,  
(As wolde God it leful were to me  
To be refreshed half so oft as he,)  
Which a gift of God had he for alle his wives ! . . .  
Blessed be God that I have wedded five.  
Welcome the sixthe whan that ever he shall. . . .  
He (Christ) spake to hem that wold live parfitly,  
And lordings (by your leve), that am nat I ;  
I wol bestow the flour of all myn age  
In th’ actes and the fruit of mariage. . . .  
An husbond wol I have, I wol not lette,  
Which shal be both my dettour and my thrall,

And have his tribulation withall  
Upon his flesh, while that I am his wif!"<sup>1</sup>

Here Chaucer has the freedom of Molière, and we possess it no longer. His good wife justifies marriage in terms just as technical as Sganarelle. It behoves us to turn the pages quickly, and follow in the lump only this Odyssey of marriages. The experienced wife, who has journeyed through life with five husbands, knows the art of taming them, and relates how she persecuted them with jealousy, suspicion, grumbling, quarrels, blows given and received; how the husband, checkmated by the continuity of the tempest, stooped at last, accepted the halter, and turned the domestic mill like a conjugal and resigned ass:

"For as an hors, I coude bite and whine;  
I coude plain, and I was in the gilt. . . .  
I plained first, so was our werre ystint.  
They were ful glad to excusen hem ful blive  
Of thing, the which they never agilt hir live. . . .  
I swore that all my walking out by night  
Was for to espien wenches that he dight. . . .  
For though the pope had sitten hem beside,  
I wold not spare hem at hir owen bord. . . .  
But certainly I made folk swiche chere,  
That in his owen grese I made him frie  
For anger, and for veray jalousie.  
By God, in erth I was his purgatorie,  
For which I hope his soule be in gloria."<sup>2</sup>

She saw the fifth first at the burial of the fourth:

"And Jankin oure clerk was on of tho:  
As helpe me God, whan that I saw him go

<sup>1</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, p. 168, l. 5610-5739.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. p. 179, l. 5968-6072.

Aftir the bere, me thought he had a paire  
 Of legges and of feet, so clene and faire,  
 That all my herte I yave unto his hold.  
 He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,  
 And I was fourty, if I shal say soth. . . .  
 As helpe me God, I was a lusty on,  
 And faire, and riche, and yonge, and well begon."<sup>1</sup>

"Yonge," what a word! Was human delusion ever more  
 happily painted? How life-like is all, and how easy  
 the tone. It is the satire of marriage. You will find  
 it twenty times in Chaucer. Nothing more is wanted  
 to exhaust the two subjects of French mockery, than to  
 unite with the satire of marriage the satire of religion.

We find it here; and Rabelais is not more bitter.  
 The monk whom Chaucer paints is a hypocrite, a jolly  
 fellow, who knows good inns and jovial hosts better than  
 the poor and the hospitals:

"A Frere there was, a wanton and a mery . . .  
 Ful wel beloved, and familier was he  
 With frankleins over all in his contree,  
 And eke with worthy wimmen of the toun. . . .  
 Full swetely herde he confession,  
 And pleasant was his absolution.  
 He was an esy man to give penance,  
 Ther as he wiste to han a good pitance:  
 For unto a poure ordre for to give  
 Is signe that a man is wel yshrive. . . .  
 And knew wel the tavernes in every toun,  
 And every hosteler and gay tapstere,  
 Better than a lazar and a beggere. . . .  
 It is not honest, it may not avance,  
 As for to delen with no swich pouraille,  
 But all with riche and sellers of vitaille. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Canterbury Tales, Wife of Bath's Prologue*, p. 185, l. 6177-6188.

For many a man so hard is of his herte,  
 He may not wepe, although him sore smerte.  
 Therefore in stede of weping and praieres,  
 Men mote give silver to the poure freres."<sup>1</sup>

This lively irony had an exponent before in Jean de Meung. But Chaucer pushes it further, and gives it life and motion. His monk begs from house to house, holding out his wallet :

"In every hous he gan to pore and prie,  
 And begged mele and chese, or elles corn. . . .  
 'Yeve us a bushel whete, or malt, or reye,  
 A Goddes kichel, or a trippe of chese,  
 Or elles what you list, we may not chese ;  
 A Goddes halfpeny, or a masse peny ;  
 Or yeve us of your braun, if ye have any,  
 A dagon of your blanket, leve dame,  
 Our suster dere (lo here I write your name).' . . .  
 And whan that he was out at dore, anon,  
 He planed away the names everich on."<sup>2</sup>

He has kept for the end of his circuit, Thomas, one of his most liberal clients. He finds him in bed, and ill ; here is excellent fruit to suck and squeeze :

"'God wot,' quod he, 'laboured have I ful sore,  
 And specially for thy salvation,  
 Have I sayd many a precious orison. . . .  
 I have this day ben at your chirche at messe . . .  
 And ther I saw our dame, a, wher is she !'"<sup>3</sup>

The dame enters :

"This frere ariseth up ful curtialy,  
 And hire embraceth in his armes narwe,  
 And kisseth hire swete and chirketh as a sparwe."<sup>4</sup> . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, prologue, ii. p. 7, l. 208 *et passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* *The Somnour's Tale*, ii. p. 220, l. 7819-7840.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 221, l. 7866.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 221, l. 7884.

Then, in his sweetest and most caressing voice, he compliments her, and says :

“ ‘Thanked be God that you yaf soule and lif,  
Yet saw I not this day so faire a wif  
In all the chirche, God so save me.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

Have we not here already Tartuffe and Elmire ? But the monk is with a farmer, and can go to work more quickly and directly. When the compliments ended, he thinks of the substance and asks the lady to let him talk alone with Thomas. He must inquire after the state of his soul :

“ ‘I wol with Thomas speke a lital throw :  
Thise curates ben so negligent and slow  
To gropen tendrely a conscience . . .  
Now, dame,’ quod he, ‘*jeo vous die sans doute*,  
Have I nat of a capon but the liver,  
And of your white bred nat but a shiver,  
And after that a rosted pigges hed  
(But I ne wolde for me no beest were ded),  
Than had I with you homly suffisance.  
I am a man of lital sustenance,  
My spirit hath his fostring in the Bible.  
My body is ay so redy and penible  
To waken, that my stomak is destroyed.’ ”<sup>2</sup>

Poor man, he raises his hands to heaven, and ends with a sigh.

The wife tells him her child died a fortnight before. Straightway he manufactures a miracle ; could he earn his money in any better way ? He had a revelation of this death in the “dortour” of the convent ; he saw the

<sup>1</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Tale*, p. 222, l. 7389.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 222, l. 7397-7429.

child carried to paradise; he rose with his brothers, "with many a tere trilling on our cheke," and they sang a Te Deum:

"For, sire and dama, trusteth me right wel,  
 Our orisons ben more effectuel,  
 And more we seen of Cristes secree thinges  
 Than borel folk, although that they be kinges.  
 We live in poverte, and in abstinence,  
 And borel folk in richesse and dispence. . .  
 Lazer and Dives liveden diversely,  
 And divers guerdon hadden they therby."<sup>1</sup>

Presently he spurts out a whole sermon, in a loathsome style, and with an interest which is plain enough. The sick man, wearied, replies that he has already given half his fortune to all kinds of monks, and yet he continually suffers. Listen to the grieved exclamation, the true indignation of the mendicant monk, who sees himself threatened by the competition of a brother of the cloth to share his client, his revenue, his booty, his food-supplies:

"The frere answered: 'O Thomas, dost thou so?  
 What nedeth you diverse freres to seche?  
 What nedeth him that hath a parfit leche,  
 To sechen other leches in the toun?  
 Your inconstance is your confusion.  
 Hold ye than me, or elles our covent,  
 To pray for you ben insufficient?  
 Thomas, that jape n' is not worth a mite,  
 Your maladie is for we han to lite.'"<sup>2</sup>

Recognise the great orator; he employs even the grand style to keep the supplies from being cut off:

<sup>1</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Tale*, p. 223, l. 7450-7460.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 226, l. 7536-7544.

“ ‘A, yeve that covent half a quarter otes ;  
 And yeve that covent four and twenty grotes ;  
 And yeve that frere a peny, and let him go :  
 Nay, nay, Thomas, it may no thing be so.  
 What is a ferthing worth parted on twelve  
 Lo, eche thing that is oned in himself  
 Is more strong, than whan it is yscatered . . .  
 Thou woldest han our labour al for nought.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

Then he begins again his sermon in a louder tone, shouting at each word, quoting examples from Seneca and the classics, a terrible fluency, a trick of his trade, which, diligently applied, must draw money from the patient. He asks for gold, “to make our cloistre,”

“ . . . ‘ And yet, God wot, uneth the fundament  
 Parfourmed is, ne of our pavement  
 N’ is not a tile yet within our wones ;  
 By God, we owen fourty pound for stoncs.  
 Now help Thomas, for him that harwed helle,  
 For elles mote we oure bokes selle,  
 And if ye lacke oure predication,  
 Than goth this world all to destruction.  
 For who so fro this world wold us bereve,  
 So God me save, Thomas, by your leve,  
 He wold bereve out of this world the sonne.’ ”<sup>2</sup>

In the end, Thomas in a rage promises him a gift, tells him to put his hand in the bed and take it, and sends him away duped, mocked, and covered with filth.

We have descended now to popular farce: when amusement must be had at any price, it is sought, as here, in broad jokes, even in filthiness. We can see how these two coarse and vigorous plants have blossomed in

<sup>1</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Somynours Tale*, p. 226, l. 7545-7558.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 230, l. 7685-7695.

the dung of the middle age. Planted by the sly fellows of Champagne and Ile-de-France, watered by the *trouvères*, they were destined fully to expand, speckled and ruddy, in the large hands of Rabelais. Meanwhile Chaucer plucks his nosegay from it. Deceived husbands, mishaps in inns, accidents in bed, cuffs, kicks, and robberies, these suffice to raise a loud laugh. Side by side with noble pictures of chivalry, he gives us a train of Flemish grotesque figures, carpenters, joiners, friars, summoners; blows abound, fists descend on fleshy backs; many nudities are shown; they swindle one another out of their corn, their wives; they pitch one another out of a window; they brawl and quarrel. A bruise, a piece of open filthiness, passes in such society for a sign of wit. The summoner, being rallied by the friar, gives him tit for tat:

“ ‘This Frere bosteth that he knoweth helle,  
 And, God it wot, that is but lital wonder,  
 Freres and fendes ben but lital asonder.  
 For parde, ye han often time herd telle  
 How that a Frere ravished was to helle  
 In spirit ones by a visoun,  
 And as an angel lad him up and down,  
 To shewen him the peines that ther were, . . .  
 And unto Sathanas he lad him down.  
 (And now hath Sathanas,’ saith he, ‘a tayl  
 Broder than of a Carrike is the sayl.)  
 Hold up thy tayl, thou Sathanas, quod he,  
 . . . . . and let the Frere see  
 Wher is the nest of Freres in this place.  
 And er than half a furlong way of space,  
 Right so as bees out swarmen of an hive,  
 Out of the devils . . . ther gonnen to drive.  
 A twenty thousand Freres on a route,



And thurghout hell they swarmed al aboute,  
 And com agen, as fast as they may gon.'"<sup>1</sup>

Such were the coarse buffooneries of the popular imagination.

### V.

It is high time to return to Chaucer himself. Beyond the two notable characteristics which settle his place in his age and school of poetry, there are others which take him out of his age and school. If he was romantic and gay like the rest, it was after a fashion of his own. He observes characters, notes their differences, studies the coherence of their parts, endeavours to describe living individualities,—a thing unheard of in his time, but which the renovators in the sixteenth century, and first among them Shakspeare, will do afterwards. Is it already the English positive common sense and aptitude for seeing the inside of things which begins to appear? A new spirit, almost manly, pierces through, in literature as in painting, with Chaucer as with Van Eyck, with both at the same time; no longer the childish imitation of chivalrous life<sup>2</sup> or monastic devotion, but the grave spirit of inquiry and craving for deep truths, whereby art becomes complete. For the first time, in Chaucer as in Van Eyck, the character described stands out in relief; its parts are connected; it is no longer an unsubstantial phantom. You may guess its past and foretell its future action. Its externals manifest the personal and incommunicable details of its inner nature, and the

<sup>1</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Prologue*, p. 217, l. 7254-7279.

<sup>2</sup> See in *The Canterbury Tales* the Rhyme of Sir Topas, a parody on the chivalric histories. Each character there seems a precursor of Cervantes.

infinite complexity of its economy and motion. To this day, after four centuries, that character is individualised, and typical; it remains distinct in our memory, like the creations of Shakspeare and Rubens. We observe this growth in the very act. Not only does Chaucer, like Boccaccio, bind his tales into a single history; but in addition—and this is wanting in Boccaccio—he begins with the portrait of all his narrators, knight, summoner, man of law, monk, bailiff or reeve, host, about thirty distinct figures, of every sex, condition, age, each painted with his disposition, face, costume, turns of speech, little significant actions, habits, antecedents, each maintained in his character by his talk and subsequent actions, so that we can discern here, sooner than in any other nation, the germ of the domestic novel as we write it to-day. Think of the portraits of the franklin, the miller, the mendicant friar, and wife of Bath. There are plenty of others which show the broad brutalities, the coarse tricks, and the pleasantries of vulgar life, as well as the gross and plentiful feastings of sensual life. Here and there honest old swashbucklers, who double their fists, and tuck up their sleeves; or contented beadles, who, when they have drunk, will speak nothing but Latin. But by the side of these there are some choice characters; the knight, who went on a crusade to Granada and Prussia, brave and courteous:

“ And though that he was worthy he was wise,  
And of his port as meke as is a mayde.  
He never yet no vilanie ne sayde  
In alle his lif, unto no manere wight,  
He was a veray parfit gentil knight.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 3, l. 68-72.

"With him, ther was his sone, a yonge Squier,  
 A lover, and a lusty bacheler,  
 With lockes crull as they were laide in presse,  
 Of twenty yere of age he was I gesse.  
 Of his stature he was of even lengthe,  
 And wonderly deliver, and grete of strengthe.  
 And he hadde be somtime in chevachie,  
 In Flaundres, in Artois, and in Picardie,  
 And borne him wel, as of so lital space,  
 In hope to stonden in his ladies grace.

Embrouded was he, as it were a mede  
 Alle ful of freshe floures, white and rede.  
 Singing he was, or floyting alle the day,  
 He was as freshe, as is the moneth of May.  
 Short was his gowne, with alevs long and wide.  
 Wel coude he sitte on hors, and fayre ride.  
 He coude songes make, and wel endite,  
 Juste and eke dance, and wel pourtraie and write.  
 So hote he loved, that by nightertale  
 He alep no more than doth the nightingale.  
 Curteis he was, lowly and servisable,  
 And carf befor his fader at the table."<sup>1</sup>

There is also a poor and learned clerk of Oxford; and finer still, and more worthy of a modern hand, the Prioress, "Madame Eglantine," who as a nun, a maiden, a great lady, is ceremonious, and shows signs of exquisite taste. Would a better be found now-a-days in a German chapter, amid the most modest and lively bevy of sentimental and literary canonesses?

"Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioressse,  
 That of hire smiling was ful simple and coy  
 Hire gretest othe n'as but by Seint Eloy;  
 And she was cleped Madame Eglentine.

<sup>1</sup> Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 3, l. 79-100.

Ful wel she sange the service devine,  
 Entuned in hire nose ful swetely ;  
 And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetisly  
 After the scole of Stratford-atte-bowe,  
 For Frenche of Paris, was to hire unknowe.  
 At mete was she wel ytaughte withalle ;  
 She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,  
 Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.  
 Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,  
 Thatte no drope ne fell upon hire brest.  
 In curtesie was sette ful moche hire lest.  
 Hire over lippe wiped she so clene,  
 That in hire cuppe was no ferthing sene  
 Of grese, whan she dronken hadde hire draught,  
 Ful semely after hire mete she raught.  
 And sikerly she was of grete disport  
 And ful pleasant, and amiable of port,  
 And peined hire to contrefeten chere  
 Of court, and ben estatelich of manere,  
 And to ben holden digne of reverence."<sup>1</sup>

Are you offended by these provincial affectations ?  
 Not at all ; it is delightful to behold these nice and  
 pretty ways, these little affectations, the waggery and  
 prudery, the half-worldly, half-monastic smile. We  
 inhale a delicate feminine perfume, preserved and grown  
 old under the stomacher :

" But for to speken of hire conscience,  
 She was so charitable and so pitous,  
 She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous  
 Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde.  
 Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde  
 With rosted flesh, and milk, and wastel brede.  
 But sore wept she if on of hem were dede,

<sup>1</sup> Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 4, l. 118-141.

Or if men smote it with a yerde smart :  
And all was conscience and tendre herte." <sup>1</sup>

Many elderly ladies throw themselves into such affections as these, for lack of others. Elderly! what an objectionable word have I employed! She was not elderly:

"Ful semely hire wimple ypinched was,  
Hire nose tretis; hire eyen grey as glas;  
Hire mouth ful smale, and therto soft and red,  
But sikerly she hadde a fayre forehed.  
It was almost a spanne brode I trowe;  
For hardily she was not undergrowe.  
Ful fetise was hire cloke, as I was ware.  
Of small corall aboute hire arm she bare  
A pair of bedes, gauded al with grene;  
And thereon heng a broche of gold ful shene,  
On whiche was first ywritten a crowned A,  
And after, *Amor vincit omnia*." <sup>2</sup>

A pretty ambiguous device, suitable either for gallantry or devotion; the lady was both of the world and the cloister: of the world, you may see it in her dress; of the cloister, you gather it from "another Nonne also with hire hadde she, that was hire chapelleine, and Preestes thre;" from the Ave Maria which she sings, the long edifying stories which she relates. She is like a fresh, sweet, and ruddy cherry, made to ripen in the sun, but which, preserved in an ecclesiastical jar, has become candied and insipid in the syrup.

Such is the power of reflection which begins to dawn, such the high art. Chaucer studies here, rather than aims at amusement; he ceases to gossip, and thinks; instead

<sup>1</sup> Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 5, l. 142-150.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 151-162.

of surrendering himself to the facility of flowing improvisation, he plans. Each tale is suited to the teller: the young squire relates a fantastic and Oriental history; the tipsy miller a loose and comical story; the honest clerk the touching legend of Griselda. All these tales are bound together, and that much better than by Boccaccio, by little veritable incidents, which spring from the characters of the personages, and such as we light upon in our travels. The horsemen ride on in good humour in the sunshine, in the open country; they converse. The miller has drunk too much ale, and will speak, "and for no man forbere." The cook goes to sleep on his beast, and they play practical jokes on him. The monk and the summoner get up a dispute about their respective lines of business. The host restores peace, makes them speak or be silent, like a man who has long presided in the inn parlour, and who has often had to check brawlers. They pass judgment on the stories they listen to: declaring that there are few Griseldas in the world; laughing at the misadventures of the tricked carpenter; drawing a lesson from the moral tale. The poem is no longer, as in the contemporary literature, a mere procession, but a painting in which the contrasts are arranged, the attitudes chosen, the general effect calculated, so that it becomes life and motion; we forget ourselves at the sight, as in the case of every life-like work; and we long to get on horseback on a fine sunny morning, and canter along green meadows with the pilgrims to the shrine of the good saint of Canterbury.

Weigh the value of the words "general effect." According as we plan it or not, we enter on our maturity or infancy? The whole future lies in these

two words. Savages or half savages, warriors of the Heptarchy or knights of the middle-age; up to this period, no one had reached to this point. They had strong emotions, tender at times, and each expressed them according to the original gift of his race, some by short cries, others by continuous babble. But they did not command or guide their impressions; they sang or conversed by impulse, at random, according to the bent of their disposition, leaving their ideas to present themselves as they might, and when they hit upon order, it was ignorantly and involuntarily. Here for the first time appears a superiority of intellect, which at the instant of conception suddenly halts, rises above itself, passes judgment, and says to itself, "This phrase tells the same thing as the last—remove it; these two ideas are disjointed—connect them; this description is feeble—reconsider it." When a man can speak thus he has an idea, not learned in the schools, but personal and practical, of the human mind, its process and needs, and of things also, their composition and combinations; he has a style, that is, he is capable of making everything understood and seen by the human mind. He can extract from every object, landscape, situation, character, the special and significant marks, so as to group and arrange them, in order to compose an artificial work which surpasses the natural work in its purity and completeness. He is capable, as Chaucer was, of seeking out in the old common forest of the middle-ages, stories and legends, to replant them in his own soil, and make them send out new shoots. He has the right and the power, as Chaucer had, of copying and translating, because by dint of retouching he impresses on his translations and copies his original mark; he

re-creates what he imitates, because through or by the side of worn-out fancies and monotonous stories, he can display, as Chaucer did, the charming ideas of an amiable and elastic mind, the thirty master-forms of the fourteenth century, the splendid freshness of the verdurous landscape and spring-time of England. He is not far from conceiving an idea of truth and life. He is on the brink of independent thought and fertile discovery. This was Chaucer's position. At the distance of a century and a half, he has affinity with the poets of Elizabeth<sup>1</sup> by his gallery of pictures, and with the reformers of the sixteenth century by his portrait of the good parson.

Affinity merely. He advanced a few steps beyond the threshold of his art, but he paused at the end of the vestibule. He half opens the great door of the temple, but does not take his seat there ; at most, he sat down in it only at intervals. In *Arcite and Palamon*, in *Troilus and Cressida*, he sketches sentiments, but does not create characters ; he easily and naturally traces the winding course of events and conversations, but does not mark the precise outline of a striking figure. If occasionally, as in the description of the temple of Mars, after the *Thebaid* of Statius, feeling at his back the glowing breeze of poetry, he draws out his feet, clogged with the mud of the middle-age, and at a bound stands upon the poetic plain on which Statius imitated Virgil and equalled Lucan, he, at other times, again falls back into the childish gossip of the trouvères, or the dull gabble of

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson, in his *Dream of Fair Women*, sings :

“ Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath  
Preluded those melodious bursts, that fill  
The spacious times of great Elizabeth  
With sounds that echo still.”—*TR.*



learned clerks—to “Dan Phebus or Apollo-Delphicus.” Elsewhere, a commonplace remark on art intrudes in the midst of an impassioned description. He uses three thousand verses to conduct Troilus to his first interview. He is like a precocious and poetical child, who mingles in his love-dreams quotations from his grammar and recollections of his alphabet.<sup>1</sup> Even in the *Canterbury Tales* he repeats himself, unfolds artless developments, forgets to concentrate his passion or his idea. He begins a jest, and scarcely ends it. He dilutes a bright colouring in a monotonous stanza. His voice is like that of a boy breaking into manhood. At first a manly and firm accent is maintained, then a shrill sweet sound shows that his growth is not finished, and that his strength is subject to weakness. Chaucer sets out as if to quit the middle-age; but in the end he is there still. To-day he composes the *Canterbury Tales*; yesterday he was translating the *Roman de la Rose*. To-day he is studying the complicated machinery of the heart, discovering the issues of primitive education or of the ruling disposition, and creating the comedy of manners; to-morrow, he will have no pleasure but in curious events, smooth allegories, amorous discussions, imitated from the French, or learned moralities from the ancients. Alternately he is an observer and a trouvère; instead of the step he ought to have advanced, he has but made a half-step.

Who has prevented him, and the others who sur-

<sup>1</sup> Speaking of *Cressida*, iv., book i. p. 236, he says:

“Right as our first letter is now an a,  
In beaute first so stood she makeles,  
Her goodly looking gladed all the prees,  
Nas never seene thing to be praised so darre,  
Nor under cloude blacke so bright a sterre.”

round him? We meet with the obstacle in the tales he has translated of *Melibeus*, of the *Parson*, in his *Testament of Love*; in short, so long as he writes verse, he is at his ease; as soon as he takes to prose, a sort of chain winds around his feet and stops him. His imagination is free, and his reasoning a slave. The rigid scholastic divisions, the mechanical manner of arguing and replying, the ergo, the Latin quotations, the authority of Aristotle and the Fathers, come and weigh down his budding thought. His native invention disappears under the discipline imposed. The servitude is so heavy, that even in the work of one of his contemporaries, the *Testament of Love*, which, for a long time, was believed to be written by Chaucer, amid the most touching complaints and the most smarting pains, the beautiful ideal lady, the heavenly mediator who appears in a vision, Love, sets her theses, establishes that the cause of a cause is the cause of the thing caused, and reasons as pedantically as they would at Oxford. In what can talent, even feeling, end, when it is kept down by such shackles? What succession of original truths and new doctrines could be found and proved, when in a moral tale, like that of Melibeus and his wife Prudence, it was thought necessary to establish a formal controversy, to quote Seneca and Job, to forbid tears, to bring forward the weeping Christ to authorise tears, to enumerate every proof, to call in Solomon, Cassiodorus, and Cato; in short, to write a book for schools? The public cares only for pleasant and lively thoughts; not serious and general ideas; these latter are for a special class only. As soon as Chaucer gets into a reflective mood, straightway Saint Thomas, Peter Lombard, the manual of sins, the treatise on definition and syllogism, the

army of the ancients and of the Fathers, descend from their glory, enter his brain, speak in his stead; and the trouvère's pleasant voice becomes the dogmatic and sleep-inspiring voice of a doctor. In love and satire he has experience, and he invents; in what regards morality and philosophy he has learning, and copies. For an instant, by a solitary leap, he entered upon the close observation and the genuine study of man; he could not keep his ground, he did not take his seat, he took a poetic excursion; and no one followed him. The level of the century is lower; he is on it himself for the most part. He is in the company of narrators like Froissart, of elegant speakers like Charles of Orléans, of gossip and barren verse-writers like Gower, Lydgate, and Occleve. There is no fruit, but frail and fleeting blossom, many useless branches, still more dying or dead branches; such is this literature. And why? Because it had no longer a root; after three centuries of effort, a heavy instrument cut it underground. This instrument was the Scholastic Philosophy.

## VI.

Beneath every literature there is a philosophy. Beneath every work of art is an idea of nature and of life; this idea leads the poet. Whether the author knows it or not, he writes in order to exhibit it; and the characters which he fashions, like the events which he arranges, only serve to bring to light the dim creative conception which raises and combines them. Underlying Homer appears the noble life of heroic paganism and of happy Greece. Underlying Dante, the sad and violent life of fanatical Catholicism and of the much-hating Italians. From either we might draw a theory

of man and of the beautiful. It is so with others; and this is how, according to the variations, the birth, blossom, decline, or sluggishness of the master-idea, literature varies, is born, flourishes, degenerates, comes to an end. Whoever plants the one, plants the other: whoever undermines the one, undermines the other. Place in all the minds of any age a new grand idea of nature and life, so that they feel and produce it with their whole heart and strength, and you will see them, seized with the craving to express it, invent forms of art and groups of figures. Take away from these minds every grand new idea of nature and life, and you will see them, deprived of the craving to express all-important thoughts, copy, sink into silence, or rave.

What has become of these all-important thoughts? What labour worked them out? What studies nourished them? The labourers did not lack zeal. In the twelfth century the energy of their minds was admirable. At Oxford there were thirty thousand scholars. No building in Paris could contain the crowd of Abelard's disciples; when he retired to solitude, they accompanied him in such a multitude, that the desert became a town. No difficulty repulsed them. There is a story of a young boy, who, though beaten by his master, was wholly bent on remaining with him, that he might still learn. When the terrible encyclopedia of Aristotle was introduced, though disfigured and unintelligible, it was devoured. The only question presented to them, that of universals, so abstract and dry, so embarrassed by Arabic obscurities and Greek subtleties, during centuries, was seized upon eagerly. Heavy and awkward as was the instrument supplied to them, I mean syllogism, they made themselves masters of it, rendered it

still more heavy, plunged it into every object and in every direction. They constructed monstrous books, in great numbers, cathedrals of syllogism, of unheard of architecture, of prodigious finish, heightened in effect by intensity of intellectual power, which the whole sum of human labour has only twice been able to match.<sup>1</sup> These young and valiant minds thought they had found the temple of truth; they rushed at it headlong, in legions, breaking in the doors, clambering over the walls, leaping into the interior, and so found themselves at the bottom of a moat. Three centuries of labour at the bottom of this black moat added not one idea to the human mind.

For consider the questions which they treat of. They seem to be marching, but are merely marking time. People would say, to see them moil and toil, that they will educe from heart and brain some great original creed, and yet all belief was imposed upon them from the outset. The system was made; they could only arrange and comment upon it. The conception comes not from them, but from Constantinople. Infinitely complicated and subtle as it is, the supreme work of Oriental mysticism and Greek metaphysics, so disproportioned to their young understanding, they exhaust themselves to reproduce it, and moreover burden their unpractised hands with the weight of a logical instrument which Aristotle created for theory and not for practice, and which ought to have remained in a

<sup>1</sup> Under Proclus and under Hegel. Duns Scotus, at the age of thirty-one, died, leaving beside his sermons and commentaries, twelve folio volumes, in a small close handwriting, in a style like Hegel's, on the same subject as Proclus treats of. Similarly with Saint Thomas and the whole train of schoolmen. No idea can be formed of such a labour before handling the books themselves.

cabinet of philosophical curiosities, without being ever carried into the field of action. "Whether the divine essence engendered the Son, or was engendered by the Father; why the three persons together are not greater than one alone; attributes determine persons, not substance, that is, nature; how properties can exist in the nature of God, and not determine it; if created spirits are local and can be circumscribed; if God can know more things than He is aware of;"<sup>1</sup>—these are the ideas which they moot: what truth could issue thence? From hand to hand the chimera grows, and spreads wider its gloomy wings. "Can God cause that, the place and body being retained, the body shall have no position, that is, existence in place?—Whether the impossibility of being engendered is a constituent property of the First Person of the Trinity—Whether identity, similitude, and equality are real relations in God."<sup>2</sup> Duns Scotus distinguishes three kinds of matter: matter which is firstly first, secondly first, thirdly first. According to him, we must clear this triple hedge of thorny abstractions in order to understand the production of a sphere of brass. Under such a regimen, imbecility soon makes its appearance. Saint Thomas himself considers, "whether the body of Christ arose with its wounds,—whether this body moves with the motion of the host and the chalice in consecration,—whether at the first instant of conception Christ had the use of free judgment,—whether Christ was slain by Himself or by another?" Do you think you are at the limits of human folly? Listen. He considers "whether the dove in which the Holy Spirit appeared

<sup>1</sup> Peter Lombard, *Book of Sentences*. It was the classic of the middle-age.

<sup>2</sup> Duns Scotus, ed. 1639.

was a real animal,—whether a glorified body can occupy one and the same place at the same time as another glorified body,—whether in the state of innocence all children were masculine?” I pass over others as to the digestion of Christ, and some still more untranslatable.<sup>1</sup> This is the point reached by the most esteemed doctor, the most judicious mind, the Bossuet of the middle-age. Even in this ring of inanities the answers are laid down. Roscellinus and Abelard were excommunicated, exiled, imprisoned, because they swerved from it. There is a complete minute dogma which closes all issues; there is no means of escaping; after a hundred wriggles and a hundred efforts, you must come and tumble into a formula. If by mysticism you try to fly over their heads, if by experience you endeavour to creep beneath, powerful talons await you at your exit. The wise man passes for a magician, the enlightened man for a heretic. The Waldenses, the Catharists, the disciples of John of Parma, were burned; Roger Bacon died only just in time, otherwise he might have been burned. Under this constraint men ceased to think; for he who speaks of thought, speaks of an effort at invention, an individual creation, an energetic action. They recite a lesson, or sing a catechism; even in paradise, even in ecstasy and the divinest raptures of love, Dante thinks himself bound to show an exact memory and a scholastic orthodoxy. How then with

<sup>1</sup> *Utrum angelus diligit se ipsum dilectione naturali vel electiva? Utrum in statu innocentie fuerit generatio per coitum? Utrum omnes fuissent nati in sexu masculino? Utrum cognitio angeli posset dici matutina et vespertina? Utrum martyribus aureola debeatur? Utrum virgo Maria fuerit virgo in concipiendo? Utrum remanserit virgo post partum?* The reader may look out in the text the reply to these last two questions. (S. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. 1677.)

the rest? Some, like Raymond Lully, set about inventing an instrument of reasoning to serve in place of the understanding. About the fourteenth century, under the blows of Occam, this verbal science began to totter; they saw that its entities were only words; it was discredited. In 1367, at Oxford, of thirty thousand students, there remained six thousand;<sup>1</sup> they still set their "Barbara and Felapton," but only in the way of routine. Each one in turn mechanically traversed the petty region of threadbare cavils, scratched himself in the briars of quibbles, and burdened himself with his bundle of texts; nothing more. The vast body of science which was to have formed and vivified the whole thought of man, was reduced to a text-book.

So, little by little, the conception which fertilised and ruled all others, dried up; the deep spring, whence flowed all poetic streams, was found empty; science furnished nothing more to the world. What further works could the world produce? As Spain, later on, renewing the middle-age, after having shone splendidly and foolishly by her chivalry and devotion, by Lope de Vega and Calderon, Loyola and St. Theresa, became enervated through the Inquisition and through casuistry, and ended by sinking into a brutish silence; so the middle-age, outstripping Spain, after displaying the senseless heroism of the crusades, and the poetical ecstasy of the cloister, after producing chivalry and saintship, Francis of Assisi, St. Louis, and Dante, languished under the Inquisition and the scholastic learning, and became extinguished in idle raving and inanity.

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Henry Anstey, in his *Introduction to Monumenta Academica*, Lond. 1868, says that "the statement of Richard of Armagh that there were in the thirteenth century 30,000 scholars at Oxford is almost incredible." P. xlviii.—Ta.



Must we quote all these good people who speak without having anything to say? You may find them in Warton;<sup>1</sup> dozens of translators, importing the poverties of French literature, and imitating imitations; rhyming chroniclers, most commonplace of men, whom we only read because we must accept history from every quarter, even from imbeciles; spinners and spinsters of didactic poems, who pile up verses on the training of falcons, on heraldry, on chemistry; editors of moralities, who invent the same dream over again for the hundredth time, and get themselves taught universal history by the goddess Sapience. Like the writers of the Latin decadence, these folk only think of copying, compiling, abridging, constructing in text-books, in rhymed memoranda, the encyclopedia of their times.

Listen to the most illustrious, the grave Gower—"morall Gower," as he was called?<sup>2</sup> Doubtless here and there he contains a remnant of brilliancy and grace. He is like an old secretary of a Court of Love, André le Chapelain or any other, who would pass the day in solemnly registering the sentences of ladies, and in the evening, partly asleep on his desk, would see in a half-dream their sweet smile and their beautiful eyes.<sup>3</sup> The ingenious but exhausted vein of Charles of Orléans still flows in his French ballads. He has the same fondling delicacy, almost a little affected. The poor little poetic spring flows yet in thin transparent streamlets over the smooth pebbles, and murmurs with a babble, pretty, but so low that at times you cannot hear it. But dull is the rest! His great poem, *Con-*

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. of English Poetry*, vol. ii.

<sup>2</sup> Contemporary with Chaucer. The *Confessio Amantis* dates from 1393.

<sup>3</sup> *History of Rosiphela. Ballade.*

*fessio Amantis*, is a dialogue between a lover and his confessor, imitated chiefly from Jean de Meung, having for object, like the *Roman de la Rose*, to explain and classify the impediments of love. The superannuated theme is always reappearing, covered by a crude erudition. You will find here an exposition of hermetic science, lectures on the philosophy of Aristotle, a treatise on politics, a litany of ancient and modern legends gleaned from the compilers, marred in the passage by the pedantry of the schools and the ignorance of the age. It is a cartload of scholastic rubbish; the sewer tumbles upon this feeble spirit, which of itself was flowing clearly, but now, obstructed by tiles, bricks, plaster, ruins from all quarters of the globe, drags on darkened and sluggish. Gower, one of the most learned of his time,<sup>1</sup> supposed that Latin was invented by the old prophethess Carmentis; that the grammarians, Aristarchus, Donatus, and Didymus, regulated its syntax, pronunciation, and prosody; that it was adorned by Cicero with the flowers of eloquence and rhetoric; then enriched by translations from the Arabic, Chaldean, and Greek; and that at last, after much labour of celebrated writers, it attained its final perfection in Ovid, the poet of love. Elsewhere he discovers that Ulysses learned rhetoric from Cicero, magic from Zoroaster, astronomy from Ptolemy, and philosophy from Plato. And what a style! so long, so dull,<sup>2</sup> so drawn out by repetitions, the most minute details, garnished with references to his text, like a man who, with his eyes glued to his Aristotle and his Ovid,

<sup>1</sup> Warton, ii. 240.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, his description of the sun's crown, the most poetical passage in book vii.

a slave of his musty parchments, can do nothing but copy and string his rhymes together. Schoolboys even in old age, they seem to believe that every truth, all wit, is in their great wood-bound books; that they have no need to find out and invent for themselves; that their whole business is to repeat; that this is, in fact, man's business. The scholastic system had enthroned the dead letter, and peopled the world with dead understandings.

After Gower come Occleve and Lydgate.<sup>1</sup> "My father Chaucer would willingly have taught me," says Occleve, "but I was dull, and learned little or nothing." He paraphrased in verse a treatise of Egidius, on government; these are moralities. There are others, on compassion, after Augustine, and on the art of dying; then love-tales; a letter from Cupid, dated from his court in the month of May. Love and moralities,<sup>2</sup> that is, abstractions and affectation, were the taste of the time; and so, in the time of Lebrun, of Esménard, at the close of contemporaneous French literature,<sup>3</sup> they produced collections of didactic poems, and odes to Chloris. As for the monk Lydgate, he had some talent, some imagination, especially in high-toned descriptions: it was the last flicker of a dying literature; gold received a golden coating, precious stones were placed upon diamonds, ornaments multiplied and made fantastic; as in their dress and buildings, so in their style.<sup>4</sup> Look at the costumes of Henry IV. and Henry V., monstrous heart-shaped or horn-shaped head-dresses, long sleeves covered

<sup>1</sup> 1420, 1430.

<sup>2</sup> This is the title Froissart (1397) gave to his collection when presenting it to Richard II.   <sup>3</sup> Lebrun, 1729-1807; Esménard, 1770-1812.

<sup>4</sup> Lydgate, *The Destruction of Troy*—description of Hector's chapel. Especially read the *Pageants* or *Solemn Entries*.

with ridiculous designs, the plumes, and again the oratories, armorial tombs, little gaudy chapels, like conspicuous flowers under the naves of the Gothic perpendicular. When we can no more speak to the soul, we try to speak to the eyes. This is what Lydgate does, nothing more. Pageants or shows are required of him, "disguisings" for the Company of goldsmiths; a mask before the king, a May-entertainment for the sheriffs of London, a drama of the creation for the festival of Corpus Christi, a masquerade, a Christmas show; he gives the plan and furnishes the verses. In this matter he never runs dry; two hundred and fifty-one poems are attributed to him. Poetry thus conceived becomes a manufacture; it is composed by the yard. Such was the judgment of the Abbot of St. Albans, who, having got him to translate a legend in verse, pays a hundred shillings for the whole, verse, writing, and illuminations, placing the three works on a level. In fact, no more thought was required for the one than for the others. His three great works, *The Fall of Princes*, *The Destruction of Troy*, and *The Siege of Thebes*, are only translations or paraphrases, verbose, erudite, descriptive, a kind of chivalrous processions, coloured for the twentieth time, in the same manner, on the same vellum. The only point which rises above the average, at least in the first poem, is the idea of Fortune,<sup>1</sup> and the violent vicissitudes of human life. If there was a philosophy at this time, this was it. They willingly narrated horrible and tragic histories; gather them from antiquity down to their own day; they were far from the trusting and passionate piety which felt the hand of God in the government of

<sup>1</sup> See the Vision of Fortune, a gigantic figure. In this painting he shows both feeling and talent.

the world; they saw that the world went blundering here and there like a drunken man. A sad and gloomy world, amused by eternal pleasures, oppressed with a dull misery, which suffered and feared without consolation or hope, isolated between the ancient spirit in which it had no living hope, and the modern spirit whose active science it ignored. Fortune, like a black smoke, hovers over all, and shuts out the sight of heaven. They picture it as follows:—

“ Her face semyng cruel and terrible  
 And by disdaynè menacing of loke, . . .  
 An hundred handes she had, of eche part . . .  
 Some of her handès lyft up men alofte,  
 To hye estate of worldye dignitè ;  
 Another handè griped ful unsofte,  
 Which cast another in grete adversaite.”<sup>1</sup>

They look upon the great unhappy ones, a captive king, a dethroned queen, assassinated princes, noble cities destroyed,<sup>2</sup> lamentable spectacles as exhibited in Germany and France, and of which there will be plenty in England; and they can only regard them with a harsh resignation. Lydgate ends by reciting a commonplace of mechanical piety, by way of consolation. The reader makes the sign of the cross, yawns, and goes away. In fact, poetry and religion are no longer capable of suggesting a genuine sentiment. Authors copy, and copy again. Hawes<sup>3</sup> copies the *House of Fame* of Chaucer, and a sort of allegorical amorous poem, after the *Roman de la Rose*. Barclay<sup>4</sup> translates the *Mirror of Good*

<sup>1</sup> Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*. Warton, ii. 280.

<sup>2</sup> The War of the Hussites, The Hundred Years' War, and The War of the Roses.

<sup>3</sup> About 1506. *The Temple of Glass. Pastetyms of Pleasure*.

<sup>4</sup> About 1500.

*Manners* and the *Ship of Fools*. Continually we meet with dull abstractions, used up and barren; it is the scholastic phase of poetry. If anywhere there is an accent of greater originality, it is in this *Ship of Fools*, and in Lydgate's *Dance of Death*, bitter buffooneries, sad gaieties, which, in the hands of artists and poets, were having their run throughout Europe. They mock at each other, grotesquely and gloomily; poor, dull, and vulgar figures, shut up in a ship, or made to dance on their tomb to the sound of a fiddle, played by a grinning skeleton. At the end of all this mouldy talk, and amid the disgust which they have conceived for each other, a clown, a tavern Triboulet,<sup>1</sup> composer of little jeering and macaronic verses, Skelton<sup>2</sup> makes his appearance, a virulent pamphleteer, who, jumbling together French, English, Latin phrases, with slang, and fashionable words, invented words, intermingled with short rhymes, fabricates a sort of literary mud, with which he bespatters Wolsey and the bishops. Style, metre, rhyme, language, art of every kind, is at an end; beneath the vain parade of official style there is only a heap of rubbish. Yet, as he says,

" Though my rhyme be ragged,  
Tattered and gagged,  
Rudely rain-beaten,  
Rusty, moth-eaten,  
Yf ye take welle therewith,  
It hath in it some pithe."

It is full of political animus, sensual liveliness, English

<sup>1</sup> The court fool in Victor Hugo's drama of *Le Roi s'amuse*.—Tr.

<sup>2</sup> Died 1529; Post-Laureate 1489. His *Bouge of Court*, his *Crown of Laurel*, his *Elegy on the Death of the Earl of Northumberland*, are well written, and belong to official poetry.



*CARDINAL WOLSEY*